

# **Land to the Tiller?**

## **Land Reform in Asia Following the Second World War**

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# Abstract

This research seeks to understand why land reform, which has been found to reduce poverty and provide a basis for equitable growth, has not been effectively implemented in many parts of the world. Comparing South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines following the Second World War, it seeks to explain why there is variation in the implementation of land reform across these cases. It argues that in order for land reform to be implemented, two conditions must be met. The first condition is that governing elites' hold on power is tentative, incentivizing them to change the status quo. The second condition is that governing elites have autonomy from landed elites, whose power they must be prepared to undermine. These two conditions were met in South Korea and Taiwan, but not in Thailand and the Philippines.

*With access to arable land, rural people at minimum can feed themselves and their families. Yet ironically, world hunger is concentrated in the countryside.*

James Boyce, Peter Rosset, Elizabeth Stanton 2005, p. 1

*Land reform can make a huge contribution in removing poverty, but it has not been effectively tried in many areas of the world. The story has to be finished...*

Amartya Sen 2009 in Lipton 2009, p. i

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# Chapter One: Introduction

Land reform can reduce poverty and support broad based economic development, as evidenced in the transfer of land from relatively large landowners to tenants and laborers in South Korea and Taiwan following the Second World War. While land reform was, and continues to be, relevant in Thailand and the Philippines, comprehensive land redistribution has not occurred. South Korea and Taiwan were poor half a century ago, but are now amongst the wealthiest and egalitarian countries in the world. The sensational growth of these two 'Asian tigers' is due to a range of factors, but land reform made an important contribution (World Bank 1993; Rodrik 1995; Kay 2002). On the other hand, the persistent structural inequalities in Thailand and the Philippines can be partly attributed to the failure of these countries to implement land reform (Putzel 1992; Krongkaew 1985).

Existing theoretical and empirical studies demonstrate the relationship between land reform, poverty reduction and broad based economic development (Tai 1974; Kuo 1976; Overholt 1976; Berry and Cline 1979; World Bank 1993; Rodrik 1995; Reyes 2002).<sup>1</sup> When land is distributed unequally, agricultural development and the broader progress of society is impeded. Large landowners tend to focus on amassing land rather than improving the productivity of existing land under their ownership. While this may increase their personal wealth, it does not raise farmers' incomes. Providing land to enterprising peasants is more likely to result in increased yields and a subsequent rise in farmers' incomes. Land reform

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<sup>1</sup> Boyce et. al. (2005) argue that land reform also can facilitate sustainable agriculture, due to environmental comparative advantages of small farms. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this idea further, it is helpful to note the numerous potential benefits of land reform.

can also unfreeze unproductive capital invested in land and divert it to other parts of the economy (Tai 1974).

In the case of Taiwan, land reform improved farmers' income and provided them with economic security. This enabled them to send their children to school, which created an educated and skilled workforce capable of supporting the countries' industrialization efforts (Shin 1998). The new class of farmers was also a market for consumer goods, which further supported the move towards an industrialized economy. The transformation resulted in rapid urbanization, which made larger and more productive farms possible overtime (Overholt 1976). The egalitarian nature of the land reforms in both Taiwan and South Korea is important. Land reform changed the structure of society. This allowed governing elites in both countries to carry out further economic reforms (Rodrik 1995) and prevented traditional elites from predatory rent seeking behavior (Boyce et. al. 2005). Without land reform, rent-seeking behavior is common. Traditional landed elites are often granted special privileges, such as monopolies, which preserves their hold on power.

In Thailand and the Philippines, elected and non-elected regimes alike have failed to redistribute land. The majority of the land in Thailand and, to an even greater extent, the Philippines, is owned by a small percentage of the total population. Widespread land reform has not occurred in either country. Peasants are at the mercy of large landowners, limiting their ability to create income from the land. Peasants are typically unable to lift themselves out of poverty. Focusing on the Philippines, Putzel (1992) explains, the model of land ownership has created both poverty and low rates of agricultural productivity. While today the Philippines is one of the fastest growing economies in Asia, the number of Filipinos living below the national poverty line in 2015 was 26.3 percent; a similar figure was reported in 2001 by the World Bank. Poverty is most prevalent in the Philippines' agriculture sector and

it is this sector that also witnesses the slowest rates of poverty reduction. According to a World Bank study completed in 2001, agriculture dependent households made-up approximately 66 percent of those in poverty in the Philippines while only accounting for 40 percent of the population (in Vargas 2003). Where land reform has been carried out in the Philippines, it has had a positive impact on rates of poverty incidence among farmer beneficiaries (Reyes 2002 in Vargas 2003). Without comprehensive land reform, the number of beneficiaries remains low. Similar links between landlessness and poverty have been established in the case of Thailand (Krongkaew 1985).

Despite the broad consensus that land reform supports poverty alleviation and equitable economic development, since the 1970s policy-makers in the West have been reluctant to support state-led land reform programs (Adams 1995). Borras explains, “changes in international political economy have transformed the structure of, limits to, and opportunities for redistributive reforms like land reform” (2007, p. 10). International development organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, prefer market-based solutions to development issues. In the agrarian context, this has resulted in efforts to modernize and update cadastral systems and land registries, which make the sale and purchase of land easier (Bernstein 2002). However, if the objective is to reduce poverty and raise productivity a “transformation in the balance of power” in the countryside and society more generally is required (Sobhan 1993, p. 7 in Boyce et. al. 2005). Land reform would achieve this. Without this underlying change, development objectives are unlikely to be met (Boyce et. al. 2005).

Development organizations have since the 1990s reconsidered the role of the market and the state in economic and human development. In its first major statement on land policy research in almost three decades, the World Bank acknowledged that even if properly



administered, markets for land do not deliver the best results for poor farmers in developing countries<sup>2</sup> (Deininger 2003 in Bobrow-Strain 2004). This more nuanced approach, however, still continues to prioritize the strict maintenance of property rights. By its very nature, comprehensive land reform challenges this principle. Land reform as a policy might appear innocuous, but it is unlikely to be advanced by international development institutions or the Western countries that fund them because it runs contrary to a founding principle of capitalism.

Western policy-makers may not support the implementation of land reform, but this does not mean that it is irrelevant at the nation-state level. Wolf Ladejinsky, a leading advocate of land reform in the post-war decades, explains it is largely a domestic issue because it is a “reflection of a particular political balance of forces in a country” (1964, p. 8). Lipton (2009) agrees that any study of land reform should focus on domestic actors. The key actors are those who govern and those who own land, although the degree of overlap between these two groups is common in countries in need of land reform. Large landowners are understandably resistant to not only the redistribution of their land, but also the redistribution of their economic and political power, which is derived from land ownership. Land reform does not improve the value of land or the status of those that own it, but results in capital being redirected towards other sectors of the economy (Tai 1974).

This thesis seeks to better understand why comprehensive land reform was implemented in Taiwan and South Korea, but not Thailand and the Philippines. It tests, integrates and expands on existing theories on the politics of land reform focusing on these four cases in

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<sup>2</sup> Economists may assume that if small farmers use land more productively than large landowners, then markets will reallocate land to them, but in reality this seldom occurs. Boyce et. al. (2005) provides two main reasons for this: The first is that the poor require money to buy land, but without land they lack the money required to secure loans. The second is that political power rather than purchasing power determines patterns of land ownership.

the decades following the Second World War. For the purposes of this thesis, and in line with definitions produced by Putzel (1992) and Lipton (2009), land reform consists of legislation introduced by the state that increases the percentage of cultivable land owned by the poor and reduces the concentration of landownership in the hands of a few large landowners. While 'land reform' and 'agrarian reform' are often used interchangeably, the term agrarian reform is a product of the Cold War. It was used to differentiate 'non-communist' land redistribution and rural development measures from 'communist' land reform (Adams 1995). For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'land reform' is primarily used, which no longer has specific communist connotations.

It is helpful to place land reform in the broader context of the history of landownership. Kennedy (1982) explains that as people started to move away from nomadic hunting and gathering towards more settled agriculture in circa 10,000 BCE, the value of cultivatable land grew rapidly, as did the power of those who controlled it. Territory was won and lost on the battlefield. Landowners acquired large swathes of land via military conquest or were allocated land by a warlord in return for their loyalty. This type of landowner is referred to as a feudal landlord. Prior to the rise of centralized states, the feudal landlord was all powerful extracting rent and tax from farmers. The rise of the centralized state saw the power of the feudal landlord lessen. They were no longer able to tax farmers, as this was the privilege of the central government, but could still collect rent. Feudal landlords often continued to have political power both within their local region and, to some degree, centrally. This type of landlord continues to exist in one form or another in many parts of the world where comprehensive land reform has never occurred. An example is the United Kingdom, where, although largely neutered, feudal landlords have never disappeared (Dore 1965). Like the United Kingdom, the Philippines has not witnessed the elimination of feudal landlords. The

key difference between the United Kingdom and the Philippines is that the political influence of feudal landlords in the latter has never been curbed.

Throughout history, when feudal landlords lost control over their land, violence was a common feature. The French and Russian revolutions of 1789 and 1917, respectively, are two of the more obvious examples of land redistribution that saw feudal landlords lose both their land and power (Dore 1965). Following the removal of feudal landlords, a new type of landowner tended to emerge, achieving their position not through military or even political means, but via economic prowess within an already established political order. These landlords were typically enterprising farmers or merchants and were likely to have smaller landholdings than feudal landlords, and no preordained political power (Dore 1965). In some countries, this second type of landlord dominates rural life. In others, their land was redistributed by the state. Returning to the examples of France and Russia, while this second type of landlord has never been toppled in France, in Russia the kulaks<sup>3</sup> swiftly lost their land and power as victims of the Soviet Union's policy of agricultural collectivization, which was implemented in the late 1920s (Dore 1965).

Ledesma (1980a) explains that there are two key periods of early land reform in the East and South East Asia region. The first took place following the end of the Second World War and saw wide-ranging land reform programs in East Asia, including China, Japan, Taiwan, North Korea and South Korea. The second major period of land reform took place from the mid-1950s in South-East Asia and was a more diverse experience for the countries involved. Efforts to implement land reform in South Vietnam occurred the mid-1950s and late 1960s. North Vietnam engaged in radical land redistribution and Burma implemented its own form of land reform under a socialist banner. While less effective than land redistribution (Lipton

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<sup>3</sup> Kulaks were peasants wealthy enough to own a farm and hire labor. Agricultural collectivization saw the consolidation of individual landholdings and labor into collective farms owned by the central Soviet state.

2009), Malaysia and Indonesia opted for land resettlement schemes, given their access to undeveloped, virgin land. Land reform has been an ongoing issue in Thailand and the Philippines in the decades following the Second World War to present day. More specific information on individual cases is discussed in the following section.

## History of Land Reform in Cases Selected

### South Korea

At the close of the Second World War, Korea, like Taiwan had thrown off the shackles of 35 years of Japanese colonial rule. Following the Japanese surrender in 1945 the Korean Peninsula was divided into two occupation zones. Administered in the north by the Soviet Union and in the south by the United States, the division felt increasingly permanent and by 1948 two separate nation-states had been created.<sup>4</sup> The Korean War, which broke out in 1950, solidified the north-south divide. Land reform was implemented in two stages in the south with this immense political and military struggle playing out in the background. In 1948, the American Military Government distributed 240,000 hectares of land that had been owned by the Japanese to former tenants. This equated to 11.7 percent of total cultivatable land. Following the formal division of the peninsula and creation of two separate nation-states, the South Korean Government initiated land reform in 1950, prior to the breakout of the Korean War. Land ownership was restricted to three hectares enabling the South Korean Government to redistribute a further 330,000 hectares of cultivatable land by 1952. Landlords sold an additional 500,000 hectares directly to their tenants prior to the implementation of the government's program. Overall, this saw 52 percent of cultivatable land change hands. By 1956, the wealthiest 6 percent of rural households owned 18 percent of the land. Tenancy rates fell from 49 percent to 7 percent of all rural households.

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<sup>4</sup> The 'First Republic of Korea' was established in August 1948. It has been referred to as 'South Korea' for the purposes of this thesis.

Cultivated land that was tenanted dropped from 65 percent to 18 percent (Ban, Moon, and Perkins 1980; Lie 2000; El-Ghonemy 1990).

## Taiwan

Prior to the implementation of land reform, the island of Taiwan had undergone significant political change. A Japanese colony from 1895 until the closing stages of the Second World War, the island became a refuge for the Chinese “Nationalists” embroiled in civil war with Mao’s communist forces on Mainland China. The Nationalist Army, led by Chiang Kai-shek, was driven from the Mainland 1949. Chiang Kai-shek’s rule as President of the Republic of China and General of the Kuomintang (KMT)<sup>5</sup> was firmly established on the island of Taiwan in the years to come. The extensive program of land reform led by Governor Chen undoubtedly contributed to the KMT’s political entrenchment.<sup>6</sup> The program was rolled out over several phases. In 1949 farm rents were reduced from 50 percent to 37.5 percent, which aided close to half of all farm households. All land that was held by Japanese nationals, which amounted to approximately 20 percent of Taiwan’s cultivatable land, was sold by the state to tenants, helping approximately 20 percent of tenant farmers. Most significantly, in 1953 landowners were required to sell all tenanted land exceeding three hectares to the state under the Land-to-the-Tiller Act. The state then resold this land to the tenants for the same 37.5 percent that they were previously paying in rent. These reforms saw 60 percent of farm families’ own land and just 16 percent remain tenant farmers. For the most part, the other 24 percent both owned land as well as a tenancy (Kay 2002).

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<sup>5</sup> The KMT or as it is often translated into English, the Nationalist Party, is a political party that was first established in Mainland China and moved to Taiwan in response to the Communist Revolution on the Mainland. It continues to be a dominant force in Taiwanese politics.

<sup>6</sup> Chiang Kai-shek appointed Chen Cheng as Governor of Taiwan Province in 1949 prior to the KMT’s retreat to the island. He became Premier of the Republic of China in 1950 under the Presidency of Chiang Kai-shek. For the avoidance of confusion, he will be referred to as ‘Governor’ for the purposes of this thesis.

## Philippines

The Philippines endured more than 400 years of Spanish colonialism,<sup>7</sup> half a century of American colonialism and three years of Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945. In 1946 the United States relinquished its sovereignty. The archipelago gained independence and instituted a democratic regime. Democratic elections came to be dominated by a small number of elite families, notwithstanding an authoritarian interlude under President Marcos from 1972 to 1986. Land and politics are intertwined in the Philippines and, as a result, land redistribution has been limited. Patterns of land ownership are largely unchanged since the end of the Second World War despite the fact that a number of land reform laws have been passed. Ghimire (2001) puts this number at 11 and argues that none of these have made a difference to the poor. Land reform attempts of note include: President Magsaysay's 1954 legislation that was pushed through the Philippine Congress, but not implemented due to landlord obstruction (Starner 1961); Marcos's attempt at agrarian reform in 1971 and his accompanying proclamation that it would be the "cornerstone of the New Society" (Estrella 1974 in Ledesma 1980a) also did little for equitable development (White 2012); and the watered down Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program under the Aquino Administration in 1987 contained enough loopholes to ensure that no significant change in landownership occurred.

## Thailand

Unlike the preceding case studies, Thailand maintained its independence during the colonial period and with the exception of initial fighting in 1941, Thailand cooperated with the Japanese during the Second World War. While absolute monarchy was abolished in Thailand in 1932, a constitutional monarchy continued to control the kingdom following the Second

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<sup>7</sup> The start of the Spanish colonial period is commonly associated with Ferdinand Magellan's arrival in the archipelago in 1521 and its end with the Spanish-American War in 1898.

World War up until 1973, when democratic elections were first introduced. Efforts to introduce democracy since have been plagued by an ongoing struggle between military and civilian elites, with the monarchy continuing to play a dominant role in politics. Land reform has not been as integral to Thai politics as it has been to the politics of the Philippines, but it has still been a contentious issue for successive Thai governments. Prior to the introduction of democracy in the 1970s, the state spent little time thinking about land reform. Instead farmer's demands were addressed on an impromptu basis by limiting rent and regularizing the size of landholdings (Ramsay 1982). The Sanya Government passed the Land Reform Act in 1975, but the incoming Kukrit Administration failed to implement the legislation. Industrialization saw the rise in landlessness among tillers as capitalists purchased land for commercial cropping (White 2012). From the 1980s, land resettlement schemes became more common than land redistribution programs (Ledesma 1980b; Lipton 2009). Limited land reform was initiated between 1992 and 1995, but again it stumbled at the implementation stage making little difference to the lives of the rural poor.

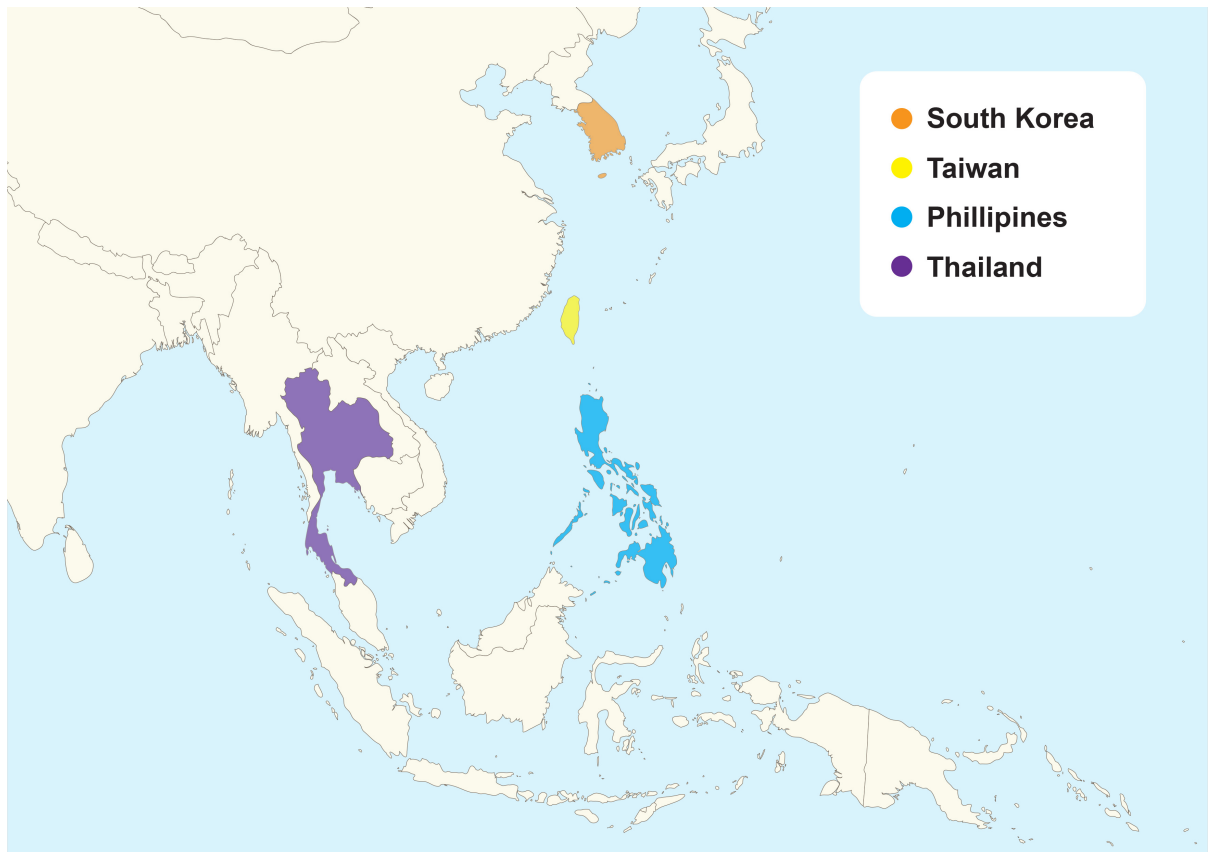
## Thesis Outline

The remainder of this thesis is structured around four chapters. Chapter Two discusses existing studies on the politics of land reform. Contemporary literature is limited and studies from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s need further reflection. Much of the literature focuses on the history of the respective countries, the geopolitical climate and the role of external actors. For example, emphasis is placed on the colonial legacy of the Spanish in the Philippines and the Japanese in South Korea and Taiwan. Others point to the threat that communism posed to Taiwan and South Korea in the post-war years, while sometimes forgetting that this same threat existed elsewhere. Foreign aid and the influence of external actors, like the United States, are argued to be another important factor. While all of these arguments are relevant to a degree, they do not appear to provide a satisfactory answer to

the research question. The most compelling argument in the extant literature focuses on the relationship between legitimacy building and class coalitions. Hung-chao Tai places this relationship at the center of his 1972 book *The Politics of Land Reform*, which covers two of the four case studies this research examines: Taiwan and the Philippines. Drawing on the existing literature, Chapter Three outlines an integrated theory on the politics of land reform. Chapter Three also develops hypotheses and discusses the comparative historical method, which will be used to test them. Chapter Four analyses the theory on the politics of land reform and draws conclusions on its validity. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the overall findings of the thesis and why they matter.



**Figure 1: Map of East and South-East Asia**



*Credit: Tessa Sinclair*

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The limited number of comparative studies on the politics of land reform are outdated, but explore important ideas. As interventionist policies such as land reform have waned in popularity, it seems so have comparative works that study the topic. Land reform continues to be a relevant issue in the Philippines, Thailand and many other countries. This thesis draws upon the existing literature to develop and test the theory on the politics of land reform. This chapter will analyze attempts within the existing literature to explain why we see variation in the implementation of land reform in the four cases under study. The survey of the literature begins by discussing the contribution of individual academics works. To make it easier to analyze the arguments presented, the existing literature has been organized into four categories: path dependency, agency, political instability and state capability.

Elias H. Tuma made an early attempt to build a theory of land reform in his 1965 work *In Twenty-Six Centuries of Agrarian Reform, a Comparative Analysis*. Tuma covers the economic, social and political objectives of land reform and its impact across eight cases, including the Roman Republic, England, France, Russia, Mexico, Japan and Egypt. Because these cases are drawn from all four corners of the globe, from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE up until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century CE, the book may attempt to cover too much ground. It also does not cover any of the four cases this thesis is centered around. It does, however, contain some useful ideas that are explored throughout this Chapter.

Hung-chao Tai's 1974 book, *The Politics of Land Reform*, is a valuable comparative study of land reform in the Philippines, Taiwan and six other countries. At the center of Tai's explanation of land reform is the relationship between legitimacy building and class coalitions. These two variables appear to be significant factors that drive the implementation of land reform. Tai also emphasizes that it is easier for democratic regimes to implement land reform than non-democratic regimes; this thesis questions the relevance of this latter point. Apart from these the contributions of Tuma (1965) and Tai, there is a distinct lack of full-length comparative works on land reform, let alone land reform in Asia.

Antonio J. Ledesma's two-part journal article on land reform in East and South-East Asia in 1980 provides a useful survey of the topic, but in the case of the Philippines, it is well out of date. Ledesma's articles are a comparative study of the socio-economic and political dimensions of land reform in the region. Usefully, Ledesma discusses the relationship between political elites and landed classes and also reflects on the role of legitimacy building. While much of what Ledesma discusses is of value and he masterfully summarizes the state of play prior to his time of writing in 1980, his work pulls together existing literature and does not offer new explanations.

Cristobal Kay's 2002 journal article: *Why East Asia Overtook Latin America: Agrarian Reform, Industrialization and Development* provides useful context on land reform. While it is comparative in nature, Kay's research question differs from that of this thesis. Kay seeks to explain why the 'Newly Industrialized Countries' of East Asia overtook Latin American countries so rapidly, and starting from a lower base of industrialization. Kay argues that agrarian reform has had a positive impact on equity and growth in East Asia, and this is one of the key reasons why this region outperformed Latin America.

Wolf Ladejinsky, an American agricultural economist who worked for the United States Department of Agriculture, the Ford Foundation and the World Bank, writes persuasively on land reform. While much of his work focuses on Japan, India and Vietnam, he discusses other countries in the region, including the Philippines and Taiwan. Ladejinsky's value lies in his characterization of land reform as an innately political project, which is central to the theory on the politics of land reform that this thesis develops and tests.

Michael Lipton's 2009 book, *Land Reform in Developing Countries* does not focus on politics. It does, however, provide a useful comparison of land reform programs worldwide, from a largely technical perspective. As a leading expert on land reform, Lipton's argument that land redistribution must continue in the developing world is noteworthy.

Aside from the aforementioned works, most of the literature does not use the comparative method, preferring to focus on single case studies. While these works provide useful information, they do not tend to build theories. James Putzel's 1992 work, *A Captive Land*, is one exception. This book provides an in-depth analysis of the politics of land reform in the Philippines, paying close attention to the role of the United States. To support his study of land reform in the Philippines, Putzel includes useful comparisons with South Korea and Taiwan throughout his analysis, focusing on the role the United States played in the three cases.

Frances Starner (1961) writes an account of land reform in the Philippines under President Magsaysay. It is heavily descriptive, only focusing on one attempt to implement land reform in a country that has since witnessed many. Ramsay (1982) writes on land reform in Thailand in the 1970s. Like Starner, his account is more descriptive than analytical.

William Overholt writes at the time of President Marcos' land reform program in 1976. He places much emphasis on the mechanics of reform, including the strength of peasant organizations, the bureaucracy and the role of centralized power, at the expense of analyzing the politics of land reform. Perhaps this is because he notes that land reform was previously ridden by politics and is hopeful that this will be different under President Marcos. The evidence he cites appears to indicate otherwise.

Jeffrey Riedinger's 1995 book, *Agrarian Reform in the Philippines*, makes a number of valid points, but does not prioritize the long list of variables that he draws on to explain President Aquino's call for land reform. He has a tendency to state the obvious without making enough of an effort to expose underlying issues. For example, Riedinger argues that President Aquino was responding to these following factors when deciding to legislate for land reform:

a highly skewed pattern of Philippine landownership, characterized by widespread rural poverty, low agricultural productivity, and a history of tenure-related peasant unrest; concerns about political legitimacy and a related desire to incorporate the rural poor into political life (motivated both by rural unrest and a commitment to participatory democracy); and the influence of Philippine and international development strategists, who pushed reform as an economic and political corrective (p. 216).

These may all be motivating factors for President Aquino, but Riedinger's work would be more helpful if it investigated each thoroughly and drew conclusions around which factors have the greatest explanatory power.

Other arguments have been made by academics focusing on broader or related topics. Erik Kuhonta's 2011 book, *The Institutional Imperative*, studies the role institutions play in promoting economic development in Thailand and the Philippines, alongside Malaysia and Vietnam. His argument that the capacity of the state is central to the implementation of

land reform, among other policies, is useful to an extent. It does not address politics, however, which play a role in determining whether a state has capacity to implement land reform. Lynn T. White, in his 2012 book, *Political Booms*, explains why Taiwan, Thailand and East China have succeeded economically and why the Philippines has failed. He draws on land reform to illustrate his argument. Jong-Sung You (2014) focuses on land reform as part of his interesting study of corruption in the Philippines, Taiwan and South Korea.

A number of academics focus on land reform from a democratic perspective. This literature offers insights into the role of civil society and grassroots movements. The 2001 book edited by Krishna Ghimire, *Land Reform and Peasant Livelihoods*, is one example. While this literature is important, it ignores the politics of land reform at the state and international level and in doing so fails to provide a complete answer to the research question this thesis seeks to answer. Moreover, it serves a different objective than the one that this thesis seeks to fulfill in that studies conducted from a democratic perspective are more normative in nature. Granted some of the objective information gathered from these studies on why grassroots movements emerge in certain locations and not in others could inform this research. Unfortunately this information is not easily obtainable across the four case studies this thesis focuses on and would broaden the scope of this study beyond practicality.

Boyce, Rosset and Stanton (2005), are more interested in studying the benefits of land reform and, like Ghimire (2001), also place a strong emphasis on grassroots engagement. In doing so, however, they fail to address the inherently political nature of land reform. By discussing the benefits of state-led land reform in East Asia following the Second World War and pinning these to the grassroots Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, they forget that these are distinctly different cases. Getting to the crux of the question, as to why land reform is implemented in some countries, but not in others, is not the key consideration of

their study. They instead seek to explain why land reform is a powerful strategy to reduce poverty while improving environmental quality.

There are a number of other scholars who have contributed to the literature who are not mentioned above, but those that have been discussed, are broadly representative. Explanations for the variance of land redistribution across the four cases under study are wide-ranging and are organized into four broad categories: path dependency; agency; political instability; and state capability. These explanations will be examined throughout the rest of Chapter Two.

### Path Dependency Theories

Path Dependency theories focus on the role of colonialism, culture and ethnic homogeneity in the success or failure of land redistribution schemes. While these factors shape a nation and can make land redistribution easier or harder to implement, alone these experiences do not provide a sufficient answer to the research question. Variables such as colonialism can inform a theory, but by themselves they are too determinate in nature. The existing literature is careful not to place too much emphasis on path dependent explanations for variance in land reform in Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines, but a few academics do go down this route.

Riedinger (1995) argues that the failure of successive Philippine governments to implement land reform “can only be explained by persisting features of Philippine society” (p. 219). For Riedinger, this includes colonialism, inequality, the power of regional landowning elites, and a weak central state. In making this argument, Riedinger effectively predicts the Philippines future, eliminating the possibility of reform. He goes onto argue that Philippine cultural values have constrained class-based action among the peasantry by directing feelings of

affinity along other axes, including personal and group identifications along regional, ethnic and linguistic lines, the principle of utang na loob (debt of gratitude) and patterns of rural dependency embodied in patron-client relations.

Putzel (1992) acknowledges that colonialism has played a key role in shaping the modern Philippine state, but he correctly maintains that the pattern of land ownership on the archipelago was not inevitable and is subject to change. While careful to not to make a path dependent argument, Putzel explains that the impact of Japanese colonialism on Korea was the opposite to that of the Philippines. The Japanese authorities diluted the power of Yangban, a class of aristocrats who dominated Korea during the Yi Dynasty, making land redistribution easier to implement. Putzel does not suggest that different colonial histories explain variance in land redistribution. He is stating that colonialism alters the structure of societies, making land reform easier or more difficult to implement, but not determining the result.

In a similar vein to Riedinger (1995), Fallows (1994) argues that culture explains the lack of economic progress and land redistribution in the Philippines. He goes on to state that, unlike East Asia, there is an absence of national unity and ambition in the Philippines. Filipinos identify strongly with their families or tribes, while others are treated as outsiders. For Fallows, this helps explain why landed elites have persistently undermined the implementation of land reform. Fallows' argues that the notion of a national economic interest, which was absent in the Philippines, enabled governments in Taiwan and South Korea to introduce land reform.

Kay (2002) argues that the period of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan laid the foundations for the later land redistribution program. Kay argues that the agriculture sector was in good



shape when the KMT took control of Taiwan. In the 1920s the Japanese modernized the sector, introducing new crops and technologies, which were conducive to intensive farming. The Japanese also integrated the peasants into the market. This meant that when land was redistributed, the underlying structure of the agricultural sector in Taiwan did not have to be altered. The landowners were not directly involved in farming; this was the domain of the tenants. When the tenants became owners, the size and nature of farms changed little. While colonialism's role in shaping the structure of the agriculture sector in Taiwan helped with the facilitation of land reform, it did not prompt it. Kay places too much weight on the impact of colonialism, at the expense of analyzing why land reform was implemented.

Kay also emphasizes the role of ethnic homogeneity and social cohesion as a reason why land reform was implemented in Taiwan and South Korea, but not the Philippines. He argues that the KMT implemented land reform because it did not have to contend with underlying ethnic or cultural conflicts in Taiwan, as rural society was homogenous. Again, Kay's analysis is too determinative. Jesudason's characterization of the role of ethnic homogeneity is more appropriate. He argues that ethnic homogeneity and social cohesion made land reform easier to implement in Taiwan and South Korea. He does not claim that social cohesion explains why reform was initiated (1989 in Doner, Ritchie & Slater 2005).

Colonial histories and the ethnic make-up of the population in each of the cases likely impacted the implementation of land reform, but these factors did not determine whether or not it would be instigated. As Ladejinsky (1964) explains, there is no doubt that patterns of land usage and customary relationships steeped in long history of social and religious traditions play a role in the design and implementation of policies, such as land reform, that have the ability to transform society, but "this does not invalidate the main premise-that the content and implementation of agrarian reform are a reflection of a particular political

balance of forces in a country” (1964, p. 8). The idea that it is the balance of forces in a country that determines whether land reform will be implemented is discussed in the sections below and in more detail in Chapter Three.

## Agency Theories

Agency arguments focus on the contribution of individuals to the success or failure of land redistribution schemes. Agency arguments place individual leaders at the center of explanations for the success or failure of land reform. From this standpoint, government policy on land reform is principally determined by the character and dedication of political leaders. Tai (1974), Ladejinsky (1964), Ghimire (2001), Herring (1983), Prosterman and Riedinger (1987) and Adams (1995) argue that the presence of political will can explain the occurrence of land reform. The heroism of leaders may be interesting, but explanations that focus on the agency of individuals do not help researchers to build testable theories.

Writing from a liberal democratic perspective, Ghimire (2001) argues that successful land reform requires a strong commitment on the part of leaders in both grassroots campaigns and in central government. Much of the book that Ghimire edits focuses on grassroots peasant movements. Such scholarship is not averse to making arguments based on normative ideals, however, it neglects the study of politics and the balance of power at a nation state level. If Ghimire focused on the agency of individuals in central government, it may become evident that governments do not generally seek to maximize social welfare. To argue that land reform will be implemented as long as there is enough political will on the part of leaders appears to ignore the relationship between land and power and the political calculations that leaders make when deciding whether or not to implement land reform.

Adams argues that “genuine political commitment of the country’s leadership” is important if land reform is to be implemented effectively (1995, p. 9). He goes on to state that “many supposed land reforms have faltered because they were opportunistically conceived in order to mobilize support at a critical time in the life of a government or an aspiring government” (p. 9). Even if researchers agree what the existence of ‘genuine political commitment’ looks like, it seems impossible to prove its presence. No plausible explanation of the variance of land redistribution across the four cases can have political commitment at its center.

Tai (1974) draws on the example of President Magsaysay in the Philippines and Governor Chen in Taiwan to argue for the importance of political will in the implementation of land reform. Tai argues that the crucial energy behind the 1955 Land Tenure Bill in the Philippines was President Magsaysay. According to Tai, Magsaysay’s dedication to reform, and the strong rural base of support that he in turn, cultivated, saw a number of resistant congressmen vote in favor of the legislation. Tai explains that Magsaysay became an advocate of land reform during the anti-Hukbalahap military campaign when he became more aware with the problems the peasantry was facing. He disagreed with the military approach advocated by his predecessor, President Quirino, resigning as Secretary of National Defense in 1953. Tai cites a letter from then Secretary of National Defense Magsaysay to President Quirino, in which he wrote that the true cause of the rebellion was the land issue. Despite mistakes made by Magsaysay, Tai argues that his personal leadership contributed more to the passing of the reform law than any other factor. While this might be the case, Magsaysay’s political will was not enough to see the successful implementation of the land reform legislation, meaning there must have been other variables at play.

Overholt (1976) analyzes whether President Marcos’ land reform program was a sincere or insincere attempt to redistribute land. He argues that land reform appears sincere because

President Marcos favored tenants at crucial points in the process and fully funded the Philippine bureaucracy to carry out land reform. He believed that “if [the Marcos Administration] could wave a magic wand and make land reform occur instantly, it would not hesitate to wave the wand” (p. 446-447). Overholt analyzes whether Marcos’ attempt at land reform is genuine, but fails to appreciate that political will is determined by the incentives that governing elites face, not altruism. Further analysis of the incentives Marcos faced would contribute more towards understanding why his land reform program was not implemented in the Philippines.

Tai (1974) also picks up on the political will argument in his study of land redistribution in Taiwan. He argues that the implementation of reform depended on individuals within the KMT and their willingness to use the military to enforce the policy. He argues that Governor Chen was central to the successful implementation of land reform on the island. He explains that the implementation of land reform was both dangerous and challenging, but Governor Chen’s determination saw it succeed and that without his resolve, it may not have occurred. While the overall theory of land reform that Tai presents is compelling, the argument that land reform in Taiwan may not have happened were it not for Governor Chen’s resolve seems too simplistic.

Ladejinsky (1964) argues that were it not for the individual actions of Governor Chen, the promise of land reform in Mainland China, the threat of insurgency and need for social stability alone may not have sufficed to bring about reform in Taiwan. While the individual actions of Governor Chen were significant, it is necessary to move beyond a ‘political will’ argument in order to understand where agency derives from. At certain points in history, land reform is in the self-interest of governing elites, and it is this self-interest that sits behind the decisions that governing elites make. The KMT’s tentative hold on power and its

limited reliance on large landowners to maintain its dominance seem to have motivated it to redistribute land.

Putzel (1992) makes a helpful critique of political agency arguments, stating that the presence or absence of 'political will' cannot properly explain reform or lack thereof. He uses the example of the Philippine President Magsaysay, who was more devoted to reform than South Korean President Rhee. While President Rhee oversaw the implementation of land reform, President Magsaysay only managed to pass legislation and was not able to implement it. Putzel utilizes Robert Chambers consideration of the 'political will' argument, "It is a conveniently black box...[which] stops short of asking who gains and who loses what, when, where and how" (1983, p. 161 in Putzel 1992, p. 374). While individuals have had an impact on the success and failure of land reform, political will alone is meaningless. Those who make political will arguments do not recognize the incentives that underpin the political decision making process. Political will cannot form the core of a theory and as a variable is difficult to test.

### **Political Instability Theories**

Political instability and legitimacy building theories focus on the role of inter-state conflict, rebellion or civil war and the subsequent need for legitimacy building reforms to explain why we see variance in the implementation of land reform. These theories offer a more convincing, if partial, answer to the research question. Scholars broadly agree that governing elites are more inclined to restructure society in order to strengthen their legitimacy if their hold on power is tentative. According to Conning and Robinson (2001) a number of scholars have "examined the incentive to redistribute land as a way of forestalling social conflict or revolution," including Grossman (1994), Horowitz (1993) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2001). Other scholars focus more specifically on the cases that this thesis studies and make

empirical observations that draw the same conclusion, including Tuma (1965), Tai (1974), Overholt (1976), Ledesma (1980a), Ramsay (1982), Hayami, Quisumbing and Adriano (1990), Putzel (1992), Campos and Root (1996), White (2012), and You (2014).

Tuma (1965) makes an early contribution to the literature on political instability, acknowledging that reform is instigated to restore the legitimacy of the regime and tends to only be discussed and implemented to the extent required to restore order. Drawing on Tuma's work, Tai (1974) places the relationship between political instability and legitimacy building at the center of his argument. For Tai, "political elites initiate reform primarily to gain political legitimacy" (1974, p. 88-89). He goes on to explain that reform is unlikely to occur unless those in power identify that they need to enhance their own legitimacy. Ledesma (1980a) states that the governments of the primarily agricultural countries of South-East and East Asia, which were facing population pressures and low levels of land ownership, turned to land reform to bolster popular support, generate political legitimacy and to reject the legitimacy of domestic rebellions or communist revolutionaries. He argues that in this climate, the democratic nature of land reform appealed to leaders who recognized the need to broaden their bases of support. Leaders used democratic ideals to build their legitimacy, including President Magsaysay in the Philippines and Governor Chen in Taiwan, who called for "land to the tiller" and President Macapagal and President Marcos, in the Philippines, who called for the "emancipation of the peasants" (in Ledesma 1980a, p. 334).

Scholars focus on the specific threat communism posed to the stability of the state in the decades following the Second World War and argue that land reform was used to counteract this. There is a consensus among scholars that the threat of communist insurgency from Mainland China encouraged the KMT to implement land reform and develop strong

institutions to promote economic growth to solidify its legitimacy (You 2014; Ledesma 1980a; Tai 1974; Adams 1995; Campos and Root 1996; and White 2012). Tai states that the land reform program was a political response to the threat to the KMT regime. He quotes Governor Chen, the lead instigator of reform in the KMT Administration, to demonstrate his point:

On the eve of rent reduction in Taiwan, the situation on the Chinese mainland was becoming critical and the villages on the island were showing signs of unrest and instability...with the implementation of rent reduction, the livelihoods of the broad masses of the farming population was immediately improved. The Chinese Communists were effectively deprived of propagandistic weapons by a new social order that had arisen in the rural areas (Tai 1974, p. 87).

Comparably, You (2014), Kay (2002) and Putzel (1992) argue that the threat posed by communists in the north of the Korean Peninsula played a critical role in advancing land redistribution in the south. You argues that the implementation of a radical land reform program in the communist north in 1946 incentivized politicians in the south to consider this option. He explains that these politicians would normally be opposed to land redistribution, but that they chose to advocate for such a policy to broaden their appeal to the peasant population. Kay reasons that the main factor that led to land reform in the south was the need to nullify influence from the communist north and limit class conflict in order to stabilize the state. Putzel concurs, stating that the decision to redistribute land can only be understood in the context of the threat posed by communist forces in the north and their effective land redistribution scheme. He argues that land reform was critical for President Rhee's legitimacy as leader of newly formed South Korea. He explains that when war with the north broke out, President Rhee lost much popularity. Land reform was a means to gain the support of the rural majority and preserve his authority over land recaptured by American and United Nations forces.

While the threat of communist insurgency played out in varying degrees in the background, scholars argue that governments also had to confront internal threats to the state. It is argued that land reform was initiated to stabilize the state and increase governing elites' legitimacy. You (2014) explains, while KMT rule was initially welcomed, the Taiwanese population soon resented the oppressive and corrupt military government. This led to an uprising in February 1947, which You argues taught President Chiang Kai-shek an important lesson about governance and reform. Similarly, White (2012) argues that the ethnic violence of 1947 was essential to the implementation of land reform in Taiwan. He compares Taiwan to the Philippines, arguing that in Taiwan the KMT had a much stronger political need to satisfy the Taiwanese population as it had only recently retreated to the island and could still be considered an outside force. Tai (1974) disagrees with White, stating that the Hukbalahap guerilla movement in the Philippines did have an impact in that it forced President Magsaysay's Administration to seriously consider implementing wide-ranging land reform in the archipelago.

Ramsay (1982) contends that for a number of decades in Thailand there had been high rates of tenancy and that commercialization of agriculture had led to growing landlessness around the country, but that land reform was never considered. The demise of what appeared to be a stable military government and subsequent demonstrations by farmers made the issue politically salient. Ramsay states that Prime Minister Sanya used the promise of land reform to win the support of farmers, students and other sectors of society at a time when the legitimacy of his regime needed to be lifted.

The literature demonstrates that like political leaders in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines, the United States also used land reform as a tool to counter global instability



and legitimize its own hegemony during the Cold War period (Putzel 1992; Ledesma 1980a and You 2014). The degree to which the United States' interests were threatened had a considerable impact on the position it took on land reform. The United States both instigated and supported land reform in South Korea and Taiwan following the Second World War. Putzel (1992) argues that land reform was somewhat of an anomaly in American foreign policy, as it challenged the existing capitalist model by undermining property rights. Land reform was only considered when there were no other options to protect and advance the interests of the United States. In the case of Taiwan and South Korea, the United States calculated that land reform aligned with its broad interests and its involvement was an important factor behind the success of these programs. For example, Putzel argues that United States' officials, such as Moyer and Ladejinsky, performed a crucial role in advancing land reform in Taiwan. As Commissioner of the Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction (JCRR) and the Chief of the Economic Cooperation Administration branch in Taiwan, Moyer lobbied the KMT regime, which depended on financial support from the United States for its survival.

In the case of the Philippines, Putzel (1992) argues that the United States only supported land redistribution when revolutionary movements threatened its economic and security interests in the archipelago and further afield. He explains that the United States initially advocated for land reform in the Philippines in response to the Hukbalahap guerilla movement during Magsaysay's Presidency, but withdrew its support once its counterinsurgency campaign succeeded to quash the movement. Putzel states that it was important that the Philippines remained anti-communist and pro-American and that land reform was one of a range of tools the United States considered utilizing to ensure this.

The political instability and legitimacy building theories discussed above are useful. They fail to explain, however, why wealth-sharing reforms were not introduced in other parts of world witnessing similar levels of political instability (Centeno 1997). Picking up on this point, Doner, Ritchie and Slater (2005) build and refine political instability and legitimacy building theories through the concept of 'systematic vulnerability.' They argue that rapidly developing states, like Taiwan and South Korea, or 'development states,' only emerge when ruling elites are confronted with a number of serious constraints, such as the threat of mass unrest; national insecurity; and a scarcity of revenue sources. All three of these constraints are required for a 'development state' to emerge. Doner et. al. argue that land reform implemented by KMT in Taiwan was a response to the threat of national reunification, via communist infiltration, with Mainland China. Land reform gave the regime legitimacy and popular support. Had the regime not been facing 'systemic vulnerability,' land would not have redistributed in South Korea and Taiwan and the "developmental state" would not have emerged. The leaders of Thailand and the Philippines never faced 'systemic vulnerability,' which Doner et. al. argue has enabled them to preserve their power with less emphasis placed on state-building.

The presence of political instability and the subsequent need to build legitimacy appears to provide a partial answer as to why land reform was implemented in South Korea and Taiwan, but not in Thailand and the Philippines. The argument that Doner et. al. (2005) make is helpful as it underscores the need for a multi-dimensional answer to the research question. While 'Systemic vulnerability' is a valuable concept, but it does not explore or account for the relationship between those deciding to implement land reform and those who own land.

## State Capability Theories

State capability theories focus on variables such as regime type, centralization of power, bureaucratic capacity and state capture versus state autonomy to explain the research question. While linked, these four variables are distinct from each other. Scholars studying the impact of regime type on the implementation of land reform focus on the differences between democratic and non-democratic regimes. Certain scholars draw conclusions around which regime type is best suited to the implementation of land reform, while others contend that regime type is irrelevant to the research question. Scholars have also written on the importance of centralized power and bureaucratic capacity as factors that have contributed to the implementation of land reform. The state capture and state autonomy theories explored at the end of this section are perhaps the most compelling.

A number of scholars make a connection between land reform and regime type. Tai (1974) argues regime type is an important determinant of successful land reform:

In those countries where a multiparty or bi-party system reigns, the prospect for prompt, effective, and drastic land reform is generally not bright. In countries where political power is concentrated in one political party or a small group of leaders, and where the elites earnestly seek to broaden their rural base, the possibility of relatively successful reform is great (p. 473).

Tai goes on to explain why democratic regimes provide landed elites with a greater opportunity to halt reform, as opposed to authoritarian regimes. He explains that in 'competitive' systems, where a large segment of the population is comprised of agricultural laborers, politics is elite driven. Agricultural laborers or peasants tend to be aligned to different parties or candidates and find it difficult to effectively advocate for their own

interests. He observes that there is less of a desire to use land reform to support the legitimacy of the regime because the elite is divided over the need for reform. In the case of 'non-competitive' systems, Tai states that regimes are not broadly based, as they do not rely on electoral support. Nonetheless, when considering land reform, the small numbers of decision-makers in 'non-competitive' systems are likely to agree to broaden their support base to include the peasantry. He cites the KMT driven land reform in Taiwan as an example of this. Tai appears to mischaracterize the issue. Whether a regime is 'competitive' or 'non-competitive' does not seem as relevant as the degree to which governing elites are autonomous from landed elites, who are likely to lobby against meaningful reform.

Overholt (1976) agrees with Tai. Focusing on the case of the Philippines, he argues that prior to President Marcos' authoritarian rule, democracy had made land reform unfeasible. While he acknowledges authoritarianism did not remove all of the barriers that had previously halted progress, it did reduce President Marcos' reliance on the Philippine Congress, which was dominated by large landowners. Overholt contends:

This enabled [Marcos] to advocate land reform forcefully, to create a unified Department of Agrarian Reform, and to fund that department fully. It enabled him to declare strong measures against bureaucrats and judges whose decisions sabotaged land reform (p. 446).

While it may have been difficult to discern at the time, President Marcos had little more autonomy from landed elites than previous Philippine presidents, which was ultimately demonstrated by his inability to implement land reform. Overholt blurs the importance of governing elites having the necessary autonomy from landed interests with regime type. Putzel (1992) helpfully explains that mere presence of an authoritarian regime does not necessarily mean that land reform will be easier to implement. For Putzel, President Marcos' rule proved that authoritarian regimes were no more likely to implement reforms than democratically elected governments.

In contrast to the argument made by Tai (1974) and Overholt (1976), Riedinger (1995) argues that the Philippine experience demonstrates that democracy is more conducive to land reform:

The Philippine case suggests that authoritarian rule is neither sufficient nor necessary to effectuate an appreciable measure of redistributive reform. However, flawed and incomplete, the new Philippine democracy has proven more conducive to redistributive reform than its authoritarian predecessor (p. 233).

Perhaps it was also difficult for Riedinger to discern at the time that President Aquino's effort to redistribute land would turn out to be as equally ineffective as President Marcos' attempt. Overall, regime type does not appear to explain why we see variance in the implementation of land reform.

Moving to the second variable discussed under state capability, Tai (1974) argues that centralized authority contributed to the successful redistribution of land in Taiwan. He explains that power was concentrated in the hands of the KMT, which meant it had the ability to design the reform program and implement it with little resistance. This may be partially attributed to the KMT's centralized rule, but it appears there are other factors at play. The autonomy that the KMT enjoyed from landowners may be the more significant variable in the case of Taiwan.

Kuhonta (2011) argues that a lack of centralized power limited the success of land reform in Thailand. He explains that there was no cooperation between policy makers in Bangkok and the bureaucrats charged with implementing reform at a local government level. The Land Reform Act in 1975 did not make any headway, as it required coercion to ensure its successful implementation. Local landed elites, whose interests would be harmed if reforms

were implemented, allied with local bureaucrats, including village heads, district officers, police and land registrars to limit implementation of the legislation. Ladejinsky (1964) explains that it is crucial for the central state to have a monopoly on violence because the threat, and at times use, of compulsion is generally inescapable if large-scale land reform is to be effectively implemented. Morell and Chai-Anan argue:

When it came to implementation, middle-and lower-level bureaucrats, indifferent or opposed to the reforms, failed to carry them out. The reformers' strength was inadequate to compel implementation in the face of such entrenched resistance (1981 in Kuhonta 2009, p. 230).

In the case of the Philippines, Ladejinsky argues that the existence of private armies is an impediment to reform. These limit the extent to which the central state can enforce the redistribution of land.

Bureaucratic capacity, the third variable discussed under state capability, is argued to be an important factor in determining the implementation of land reform (Overholt 1976; Ghimire 2001; Kuhonta 2011; Kay 2002; Adams 1995; and Quisumbing and Adriano 1990). Poor land records, unreliable credit sources and a lack of government personnel on the ground all undermine the implementation of land reform. The role of the state is crucial for practical reasons, for example undertaking cadastral surveys and providing technical and monetary assistance (Ghimire 2001). Quisumbing and Adriano explain further:

Not all failures in implementation should be ascribed to the obstructionist tendencies of landlords. The basic infrastructure needed for successful land reform implementation in the Philippines – accurate land records, a disciplined bureaucracy and efficient organizations of prospective beneficiaries – is grossly insufficient when compared with the conditions of land reforms in Japan and Taiwan (1990, p. 82).

Picking up on this point, Adams argues, “Also important for success in Taiwan were accurate land tenure data and the non-indigenous bureaucracy that had accompanied President

Chiang Kai-shek” (1995, p. 3). Adams’ argument alludes to more than bureaucratic capability; it highlights the likely autonomy of the non-indigenous bureaucracy from large landowners. Perhaps the autonomy of the bureaucracy, as opposed to its capability, contributed more to the implementation of land reform in Taiwan.

In the case of South Korea, questionable arguments have also been made on the contribution of the bureaucracy to the implementation of land reform. Kay (2002) contends that South Korea’s relatively competent bureaucracy, adequate land ownership records and reasonable tenure relations aided the implementation of land reform. Contrary to this, You (2014) argues South Korea’s bureaucracy was neither meritocratic nor competent when land reform was implemented following the Second World War, although it has improved measurably since.

A 1993 World Bank report suggested the Filipino bureaucracy lacked the cohesion to implement and enforce the complex land reform legislation passed under the Aquino Administration. Kuhonta (2011) argues that the Philippine bureaucracy was fragmented and undisciplined, which impacted President Aquino’s ability to implement widespread reform. Kuhonta goes on to note that President Aquino could have done more, however, to strengthen the capacity of the state apparatus in order to give agrarian reform a better chance of succeeding. Kuhonta stops short of suggesting that the Philippine bureaucracy was not strong enough to implement land reform because it had been captured by landed interests, but it appears that this may have been the case.

Riedinger (1995) found that “Philippine agrarian reform is open to abuses as landowners alter their landownership records and cropping patterns in an effort to avoid reform” (p. 181). Conning and Robinson (2001) argue:

In countries where per capita land inequality is highest, there is a greater incentive to challenge property rights via the political system, and this makes landlords more likely to organize agriculture in a politically defensive manner, by limiting tenancy (p. 4).

They go on to explain that, unlike the case of the Philippines, in South Korea and Taiwan large landowners did not have time to reorganize production because land reform occurred quickly and unexpectedly.

Putzel (1992) argues that studying the capacity of the Philippine bureaucracy is not helpful and that this issue must be understood in a broader sense. For Putzel, the lack of a capable bureaucracy in the Philippines and poor land records was the result of a “particular balance of power: since the colonial period, landowning interests have shackled the bureaucracy and blocked every attempt at comprehensive land registration” (p. 374). This is a common thread that also runs through Ladejinsky’s (1964) writing on land reform:

Neither success nor failure can be attributed primarily to the presence or absence of experts to a special reform mystique. The usefulness of facts, figures and preparatory work no one can deny; but reforms cannot be “researched” or “studied” into existence. Of far greater importance is the acceptance of the reform idea, to begin with, in such a manner that technical problems are not an excuse for inaction, but something to be resolved. There is no country in Asia, however, undeveloped, which does not know how to write a reform law, or what its implications might be. They have written them, and many have not been carried out—precisely because the political decision-makers understood their implications and inevitable repercussions (p. 8).

The final variable discussed in this section, state capture, may explain why land reform has not been successfully implemented in the Philippines and other parts of the world, as opposed to lack of bureaucratic capacity.



Moving to the final variable under state capability, the impact of state capture or state autonomy on a government's ability to implement land reform is alluded to frequently in the literature, but few scholars discuss it in detail. When state capture or state autonomy does feature it does not have a strong theoretical basis. Scholars have a tendency to cite empirical examples to argue that if a state is captured by landed interests, land reform is unlikely to occur. Tai (1974) makes the largest contribution to the literature on state capture and state autonomy by investigating the relationship between large landowners and governments. He explains overwhelmingly it is the compromise sought between the government and large landowners that determines the success or failure of land reform. He notes that large landowners are often well educated and politically mobile and are likely to challenge any decisions in favor of redistributing land. The relationship between the government and large landowners appears to be highly relevant to the research question.

There is a consensus among scholars that the Philippine state has been captured by landed interests and that this has had an impact on its ability to implement land reform throughout the period under study. Conversely, Taiwan is often held up as an example of a government that had a high degree of autonomy from large landowners (Tai 1974; Putzel 1992; You 2014). The literature places South Korea in the middle of the Philippines and Taiwan. Putzel (1992) and You (2014) explain that the American Military Government was insulated from large landowners in the south of the Korean Peninsula, which made it straightforward to implement the first wave of land reform. You demonstrates, however, that unlike the American Military Government, President Rhee's administration did not enjoy a high level of autonomy from large landowners, but that land reform still occurred. The arguments presented on state capture and state autonomy appear to have some validity, but scholars do not build a solid theory to support the high level statements and empirical examples they

cite. Chapter Three seeks to build a theory to help situate the notion that state capture is detrimental to the implementation of land reform, while state autonomy is facilitative.

Of the four state capability theories, the discussion on state capture and state autonomy appears to provide the most convincing explanation of why land reform was implemented in some cases, but not in others. While the effect of regime type on the implementation of land reform does not seem to be a significant variable, it is heavily debated in the literature surveyed, which makes further investigation sensible. The degree to which a state is centralized does appear to have an impact on the implementation of land reform, but state centralization in and of itself is not an explanation of why land reform occurs or does not occur, so it will not be explored further. Bureaucratic capacity seems to have an impact on whether land reform is implemented successfully, however, similar to centralized power, it does not explain why land reform is or is not implemented. Bureaucracy can also be beholden to politics; in certain circumstances, political decision-makers under-invest in parts of the bureaucracy to serve their broader political interests.

The usefulness of the literature on the politics of land reform covering the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan is varied. Path dependent and agency theories do not provide an adequate answer to the research question. The former cannot by definition determine whether or not land reform will be implemented and the latter fail to recognize the incentives that inform the political decision-making process. Theories on political instability and legitimacy building may provide a partial answer as to why land reform is implemented in some cases, but not others. Alone, they do not account for the relationship between those deciding to implement land reform and those who own land. It is this relationship that appears to determine whether the state has the requisite autonomy to redistribute land. In summary, political instability together with state autonomy seem to

explain why land reform was implemented in South Korea and Taiwan, but not in the Philippines or Thailand. The next chapter, Chapter Three, will take these ideas to build a theory on the politics of land reform. Chapter Three also discusses the methodology used to test the theory.

# Chapter Three: Theory & Method

## Theory Building

*The way in which the government actually makes decisions depends upon the nature of the fundamental power relation between the governors and the governed in its society – Downs 1957*

The literature discussed in the preceding chapter demonstrates that a number of scholars have attempted, both directly and indirectly, to explain variation in land reform across Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Some of these explanations resonate, while others do not appear to fully explain why land reform is implemented in some countries, but not others. While not all of his arguments are helpful, Hung-chao Tai (1974) provides the most convincing explanation, which focuses on the relationship between legitimacy building and class coalitions. Empirically Tai's explanation appears to ring true, but it does not have a strong theoretical underpinning. This chapter will draw on useful scholarship, including Tai's work, detailed in Chapter Two, to build a theory on the politics of land reform and develop hypotheses or assumptions that will be tested in the next chapter, Chapter Four.

The theory on the politics of land reform is based on the underlying premise that governing elites are not motivated to implement policies that benefit society unless these policies act to maximize their self-interest.<sup>8</sup> The decision to implement land reform is based on the

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<sup>8</sup> This thesis draws on the 1957 work of Antony Downs to explain the concept of self-interest in the context of government. For Downs, governing elites maximize their self-interest by acquiring the income, power and prestige that go with office.

incentives governing elites face. If the implementation of land reform will undermine their political power, as rational actors, governing elites will decide against it. It is also assumed that governing elites do not seek to maximize social welfare when making policy decisions. It is problematic to believe that the role of government is to promote 'social welfare;' even if agreement could be reached on what 'social welfare' is and how it can be maximized, there are no guarantees that governing elites would be motivated to pursue it (Downs 1957). In the context of land reform, for example, it has been recognized that the redistribution of land would advance socio-economic development in Thailand and the Philippines, yet governing elites have failed to act.

Politics confines governing elites and creates incentives that can result in the alignment of their self-interest with the interests of the citizenry, or certain segments of it. Like all self-maximizing individuals, governing elites can still serve the wider interests of society by acting in their self-interest.<sup>9</sup> The social function of political parties, which is to create and implement policies when in power, is undertaken as a by-product of their motivation to acquire power. In a democratic context, political parties, and the individuals that led them, create policy to acquire power. Political parties do not pursue political office to implement predetermined policies or work on behalf of interest groups. Instead, political parties create policies and work on behalf of interest groups to acquire office (Downs 1957).

Applying this theory of institutionalized democratic government to non-democracies and uninstitutionalized democracies, the likelihood that governing elites desire to acquire power will align with the creation and implementation of specific policies becomes more uncertain. Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines would not be deemed institutional democracies during the period land was implemented in the case of Taiwan and South Korea

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<sup>9</sup> This concept forms the basis of economic theory. Adam Smith's theory of the division of labor explains that when individuals pursue their own needs, they simultaneously carry out social functions.

or discussed in the case of Thailand and the Philippines. Governing elites in oligarchic or autocratic systems still maintain their support base just as political parties must appeal to voters, but this base is often smaller than in an institutionalized democracy. While the support base is likely to benefit from their pursuit and maintenance of power, the welfare of wider society can more easily be neglected. Writing reform law and understanding its implications is something that all countries, wealthy and poor, can accomplish. However, the implementation of these laws is a hurdle which most cannot leap due to the powerful opposition of landed elites.

“They have written them, and many may not have been carried out – precisely because the political decision-makers understood their implications and their inevitable repercussions”  
(Ladejinsky 1964, p.454).

Whether studying a democracy or non-democracy, if a policy is detrimental to governing elites ability to maintain their power, it is unlikely to be pursued.

In summary, the decision to implement land reform is an arbitrary decision governing elites make in their self-interest. It is dependent on whether the support base of the political party, group of oligarchs, or authoritarian leader, in question, will benefit from the redistribution of land. Despite the possibility that private motive and public good can be complementary, we cannot always assume that the behavior of governments is socially optimal any more than we can assume that a firm creates a socially optimal output (Downs 1957). From the perspective of governing elites, land reform is a means to an end. Governing elites will not implement land reform if it will not maximize their income, power and prestige.

It is not often in the self-interest of governing elites to enforce efficient property rights because it is easier to simply grant monopoly property rights to powerful groups. The ‘transaction cost’ involved in monitoring property rights, creating suitably complex tax

regimes, and collecting taxes, is greater than the potential revenue earned by governing elites. Secondly, governing elites face a 'competitive cost' as powerful groups that are economically disadvantaged by an efficient property rights regime, which does not serve their interests, have the ability to overthrow and replace governing elites (North 1981).

If an economy is heavily reliant on agricultural output, landed elites are likely to be a powerful group in society. Under such circumstances, the elites who control agrarian output also control the surplus, the export income, or import subsidies. For this reason, governments become economically reliant upon landed elites. In a country with stronger manufacturing and services sectors, landed elites will not be nearly as powerful, but at the same time, nor will land reform be as relevant (Herring 1983).

It is almost a tautology to point out that in most societies in need of agrarian reform, it is likely that landowners have considerable influence over the state (Putzel 1992, p.375).

Overall, governing elites act to advance their self-interest and it is easier for them to create property rights regimes that are uncomplicated to administer and sympathetic to the interests of powerful groups. It is hard to find a society in need of land reform, where landed elites are not a powerful group with considerable influence over governing elites. Under normal circumstances, land reform is, therefore, unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites.

There is an important exception to the notion that land reform is unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites. When the position of governing elites is threatened, coalitions are often broadened to include peasants or workers, but when little threat exists, coalitions tend to remain narrow (Herring 1983; Waldner 1999) and property rights regimes favor the powerful (North 1981). If the collapse of the current regime is an imminent possibility, landed elites themselves may opt for coalitions to be broadened and land reform to be

implemented. For landed elites, being compensated for the loss of their land, even if at a rate below market value, is more advantageous than land being forcibly removed during a civil war or revolution. By broadening coalitions, governing elites build political legitimacy, which enables them to hold on to the reigns of power. Reform changes the fabric of society; it is the middle ground between status quo and revolution. As such, land reform only occurs when governing elites' hold on power is tentative.

Thus far the theory on the politics of land reform assumes that governing elites act in their self-interest and that land reform is unlikely to be implemented unless their hold on power is tentative. The assumption that governing elites act in their self-interest transcends regime type, which means that whether a country has a democratic, oligarchic or authoritarian regime, this is unlikely to determine whether land reform will be implemented. It may initially be appealing to argue the opposite because regime type is a relevant variable across the four cases under study, but on closer inspection, regime type does not appear to explain variance in the implementation of land reform. The Philippine experience alone seems to demonstrate that both elected and non-elected governments have difficulty implementing land reform in the archipelago.

All governing elites, whether they are operating within democratic or non-democratic regimes, rely on bases of support from society in order to preserve their power. Special interests within democratic regimes are harmful to the wider interests of society because the policy making process in a democracy offers numerous opportunities for groups to lobby the government. Over time, small concessions to certain groups in society add up and start to undermine the competitiveness of the economy (Olson 1982). Whether concessions are granted to a small band of influential supporters or to many special interests, democratic and non-democratic regimes are not insulated from societal pressures. It may be tempting



to argue that non-democracies are more insulated from societal pressure, but autocrats and oligarchs also need to service support bases in order to perpetuate their rule, even if these support bases tend to be narrower than in an institutionalized democracy. Autocrats and oligarchs are acutely aware that if they fail to serve their base, they will be removed from power. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in countries in need of land reform, landed elites are likely to influence those that govern. The common preoccupation of scholarship with regime type, a form of binary categorization, can lead theorists to overlook more nuanced variables. While trying to understand power structures within society is more difficult than pinpointing regime type, it appears that undertaking this work may provide a fruitful answer to the research question.

The final assumption of the theory on the politics of land reform is that land reform is likely to be determined by the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites. The 'degree of governing elite autonomy' is defined as the extent to which governing elites can make and implement decisions free from external control or influence. As outlined above, governing elites rely on support bases in society to maintain their position, but the extent of this reliance is always a matter of degree. Certain regimes are heavily indebted to groups in society and have little room to maneuver. Other regimes might be built on the back of an occupying force and as outsiders may enjoy more autonomy. The case of Taiwan is an obvious example; if governing elites are not shackled to the landowning class, they can use land reform during moments where their hold on power is threatened to gain the support of wider society and increase the legitimacy of their rule.

The relationship between governing elites and landed elites is significant because landed elites tend to be educated and as a result are able to articulate their demands more effectively than other groups in society, such as peasants (Tai 1974). In addition, and as

discussed earlier, North (1981) and Putzel (1994) explain that landed elites are also likely to be powerful members of society, especially in countries in need of land reform. When landed elites stand to lose their land and the influence that stems from it, they will be inclined to resist land reform and redistribution is likely to be minimal. If governing elites rely on landed elites to perpetuate their rule, they will be unlikely to implement land reform. Falling short of an agrarian revolution, if governing elites are independent of large landowners it is more likely that they will implement effective reforms (Tai 1974). It is assumed that there is a correlation between the source of governing elites' power and the policies that they choose to implement; ultimately, no group of elites will legislate themselves out of power (Ledesma 1980a).

The relationship between governing elites and agricultural laborers or tenants does not seem to be significant to the land reform equation. Peasants are unlikely to attain the necessary level of education to be able to organize themselves effectively and become a concentrated lobbying force. Instead, they are dependent on landed elites.

The agrarian system fosters the imperfect translation of numbers and interests into political power through mediation of patron-client relations, 'vote banks', dependence, and ideology" (Herring 1983, p. 217).

Even if peasants are not coerced to vote a certain way, many peasants vote in terms of perceived patronage (Riedinger 1995). Elections are a "conservative device, which gives a semblance of popular legitimacy to traditional structures and traditional leadership" (Huntington 1968, p. 402). Acting alone, peasants are not easily able to influence governing elites. It is the ability of governing elites to deal with their landed cousins that is central to understanding why land reform occurs in some countries and fails in others.

## Hypotheses

The preceding discussion demonstrates that there are a number of aspects to the theory on the politics of land reform. These will be tested drawing on empirical evidence from the four case studies in the following chapter, Chapter Four. The first aspect of the theory is the assumption that under normal circumstances, land reform is unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites. While this broadly applies, the second aspect of the theory is the exception that if governing elites' hold on power is tentative, land reform may be a useful tool to maximize their self-interest. In order to eliminate a counter theory it is assumed that regime type is unlikely to determine the extent of land reform. The final aspect of the theory is the assumption that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform. Together these assumptions come to represent the theory on the politics of land reform: that land reform is unlikely to be implemented unless governing elites' hold on power is tentative and they have sufficient autonomy from landed elites to carry out their reform program. *Figure II: Preliminary Theory on the Politics of Land Reform* illustrates this.

***Figure II: Preliminary Theory on the Politics of Land Reform***

	Governing Elites Captured by Landed Elites	Governing Elites Autonomous from Landed Elites
Governing Elites' Hold on Power Stable	✗ No Land Reform	✗ No Land Reform
Governing Elites' Hold on Power Tentative	✗ No Land Reform	✓ Land Reform

Credit: Tessa Sinclair

## Method

The second half of Chapter Three discusses the methodology used to test the assumptions or hypotheses that make-up the theory on the politics of land reform discussed above. The method underpins the analysis that will be undertaken in the next chapter and ensures that conclusions drawn are valid. Good social science research draws broader conclusions from the data beyond what is directly observable. Because social science research is based on imperfect and complex information, good research draws conclusions with a healthy degree of uncertainty. The use of explicit methods, drawing on evidence that is codified and public, is important so that others can assess research findings. A good theory should be concrete enough that it can be proved wrong. This can be achieved by ensuring that the theory can generate as many observable conclusions as possible so that these can be falsified (King, Keohane and Verba (1994).

### Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies

This thesis will utilize qualitative methodology largely because the politics of land reform cannot meaningfully be studied in ways that allow for the testing of hypotheses with quantitative data. The logic of inference is something that both quantitative and qualitative methodologies use and both of these methodologies have strengths and weaknesses. While initially they may seem at odds with each other, these two styles are more complementary than competitive. Qualitative studies usually focus on a smaller number of cases than quantitative studies, but this allows the researcher to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the given phenomena. Whether a case study, area study or comparative study, the detailed information unearthed can be used to develop theories. Quantitative studies test theories developed by qualitative studies on a greater number of cases. They employ the use of statistics in order to eliminate rival explanations and make generalizations, expanding our

knowledge of a subject. As the body of qualitative literature on the politics of land reform grows, the ability of researchers to undertake a quantitative study will also increase. Social science as a field of academic study is not viable without both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (King et. al. 1994).

### Comparative Historical Methodology

The comparative historical method is the best means to test the theory of the politics of land reform. At the heart of all social science is comparison. It is through comparison that we start to comprehend the world around us. It allows us to go beyond the descriptive to understand 'why' and 'how' phenomena occur or do not occur. The comparative method is best employed when a researcher seeks to test hypotheses on more than one case, but less than the thirty or so cases required to use the statistical method. Given this thesis is studying historical events, it draws on the comparative historical method utilized by the likes of Barrington Moore in his seminal work, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966) and Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens in *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (1992). The advantage of the comparative historical method is that it enables the researcher to make generalizations. Moore explains why this is important:

Generalizations that are sound resemble a large-scale map of an extended terrain, such as an airplane pilot might use in crossing a continent. Such maps are essential for certain purposes just as more detailed maps are necessary for others. No one seeking a preliminary orientation to the terrain wants to know the location of every house or footpath. Still, if one explores on foot...the details are what one learns first. Their meaning and relationship emerges only gradually (1966, p. xx).

New and useful theories emerge from the study of political phenomena from a comparative perspective. The case study method, which involves the detailed study of a single case to answer a research question, provides valuable information on which comparative works draw heavily, but it does not have the same explanatory power as comparative methods.

The act of comparing also offers an opportunity to test the validity of previously accepted explanations (Moore 1966). Without being able to generalize, it is difficult to build and test theories. Without theories we cannot start to answer 'why' or 'how' phenomena occur, or do not occur.

The comparative historical method, like all methodologies, has certain drawbacks. With its emphasis on generalizations and theory building, the comparative historical method may encourage a researcher to overstate the evidence gathered from a particular case to fit their broader theory (Moore 1966, p. xix). It has been argued that researchers using this method are more likely to equate correlation with causation due to the focus on historical sequences (Goldthorpe 1991 in Rueschemeyer and Stephens 1997). Nevertheless, scholars utilizing the statistical method to demonstrate correlations between variables cannot establish causation either. To address the problem of equating correlation with causation researchers can focus carefully on the relationship between the theory and evidence and it is the historical comparative method that encourages the researcher to closely examine the evidence (Rueschemeyer and Stephens).

A second problem that has been identified with the comparative historical method concerns the small number of cases that are used to unravel complex causal trends. The study of a limited number of cases can lead to the researcher finding a number of explanations equally well supported by the evidence, which can lead to mistaken conclusions (Goldthorpe 1991 in Rueschemeyer and Stephens 1997). Researchers employing both the comparative historical method and the statistical method can tend to favor a single explanation or variable over a competing and more complicated explanation or multiple variables. While both methods can move beyond this problem, the historical comparative method is useful in that it allows the

researcher to uncover agency and historical sequence and in turn eliminate some explanations and strengthen the case for others (Rueschemeyer and Stephens).

### Case Selection

This thesis employs a Most Similar Systems Design to select and compare the four cases under study to determine why land reform has occurred in some, but not others. Most Similar Systems Design involves comparing similar cases, which only differ in the dependent variable: the degree to which land reform has been implemented. Through a process of elimination, the remaining differences amongst the similar countries can be used to explain why land reform has been implemented in only two of the four cases this thesis studies (Huang, Kuo and Stockton 2002).

South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines are ideal cases to explore in order to understand variation in land redistribution. At the close of the Second World War, there were a number of political and economic similarities between them. Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines endured significant periods of colonial rule prior to the Second World War, albeit they were not subjected to the same colonial master. On this measure, Thailand is an outlier because it was never colonized. In all four cases, the Japanese occupied their territory during the Second World War. Throughout the Cold War, the timing of which aligns with the time period under study, all four countries aligned themselves with the United States, as opposed to Russia or China, unlike a number of other countries in the region. When land reform was being considered at different times in South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines all three cases experienced democracy, although the degree to which democracy was institutionalized in any of these cases is questionable. Taiwan was not a democracy when land reform was implemented, nor was what was to become South Korea when the American Military Government implemented the first wave of land reform, or the

Philippines when President Marcos attempted to redistribute land. South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines were all relatively poor prior to World War II. Economically, all four countries were all hurt by the war. In electing to study these four cases, it is significant that the use and ownership of land was central to the politics of Taiwan and South Korea prior to reform, and continues to be highly relevant in the Philippines and to a lesser extent, Thailand. South Korea and Taiwan experienced rapid economic development in the decades following land reform. This thesis limits its comparisons to those between South Korea and Taiwan before and during land reform in the late 1940s and early 1950s with Thailand and the Philippines during all land reform attempts from the 1950s up until present day. It is acknowledged that this may weaken the comparison given the changed external environment in which the question of land reform was being considered. *Figure III: Key Indicators for Comparison of Case Studies* on page 57 provides information on each of the four cases for ease of comparison.

### **Data Sources and Hypothesis Testing**

For the purposes of this thesis, the evidence used to test the hypotheses or assumptions will be obtained through secondary source material. Given the limited scope of this thesis and the information available in the secondary source material, the hypotheses will not be tested as rigorously as proponents of the comparative historical methodology may desire. It is, therefore, important to note that the findings of thesis represent a preliminary test of the theory on the politics of land reform, as applied to the four cases selected.



**Figure III: Key Indicators for Comparison of Case Studies**

	Phillipines	Taiwan	South Korea	Thailand
Implementation of Land Reform	No	Yes	Yes	No
Year Land Reform Implemented	n/a	1949-1953	1948 and 1950-1956	n/a
Percentage of Rural Households Who Own Land Prior to Reform			14%	
Percentage of Rural Households Who Own Land Following Reform		84% <sup>[3]</sup>	17% in 1947 70% in 1965 <sup>[4]</sup>	
Regime Type During Implementation of Land Reform/Attempted Land Reform	Partial Democracy/ Non-Democracy	Non-Democracy	Partial Democracy/ Non-Democracy	Partial Democracy/ Non-Democracy
History of Colonialism or Occupation	Spanish (1521 - 1898) American (1898 -1946) Japanese (1942 - 45)	Japanese (1895 - 1945)	Japanese (1910 - 1945)	Japanese (1942 - 45)
Cold War Allegiance	United States	United States	United States	United States
Level of GDP 1940 (millions) <sup>[1]</sup>	\$24,993	\$8,064	\$25,001	Data unavailable
Level of GDP 1946 (millions) <sup>[2]</sup>	\$12,131	\$5,274	\$11,295	Data unavailable

[1] One year prior to World War II breaking out in the Pacific in 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars ([www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical\\_Statistics/horizontal-file\\_03-2007.xls](http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/horizontal-file_03-2007.xls))

[2] One year following World War II breaking out in the Pacific in 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars ([www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical\\_Statistics/horizontal-file\\_03-2007.xls](http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/horizontal-file_03-2007.xls))

[3] This figure is an estimate. According to You (2014) 60% of families owned their own land and another 24% largely owned land and a tenancy, while 16% of families continued to be tenant farmers following the reforms.

[4] See Ledesma (1980)

*Credit: Tessa Sinclair*

## Chapter Four: Analysis

This chapter uses secondary source material to test the theory on the politics of land reform that was developed in Chapter Three on the cases of Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to test whether land reform will be implemented if governing elites' hold on power is tentative and they have sufficient autonomy from landed elites to carry out their reform program.

### Self-Interest

The theory on the politics of land reform is based on the underlying premise that governing elites are unlikely to be motivated to implement policies to the benefit of society unless these policies align with their self-interest. Under normal circumstances, it is assumed that land reform is unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites. Empirical evidence is drawn from the four case studies to test this assumption.

The case study of the Philippines provides evidence in support of this assumption that under normal circumstances, land reform is unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites. In the Philippines, the unequal distribution of land has served generations of governing elites well. It has been in the self-interest of governing elites in the Philippines to grant monopoly rights to land, both to reduce the cost of administering more complicated property rights and, significantly, to ensure that powerful landed elites continue to support successive Philippine governments. While the period under study dates from the end of the Second World War, it is helpful in the case of the Philippines to delve back to the Spanish colonial

era to understand the politics around land reform. Mangahas (1987) explains, “The root of the land distribution problem [in the Philippines] has been the abuse of state prerogatives, over the centuries, to grant land and any other natural resources to the merely powerful and hence socially undeserving few” (in Putzel 1992, p. 4). Based on the literature this thesis has surveyed, the story of land in the Philippines has changed little from the Spanish colonial era up until the present day.

During the Spanish colonial period, land was controlled by a small number of people and dominated by plantation cropping. The Spanish rulers presented vast haciendas to a small number of families, who as a result came to dominate politics and economics (Putzel 1992). In a similar fashion to the Spanish, American colonialists appear to have quickly realized that their political and economic interests would best be served by maintaining the status quo, despite being well aware of the issues arising from landlessness. From the outset of American colonialism, the United States resisted the redistribution of land. For example, the sale of the friar lands at the turn of the twentieth century was managed by the state as a market transaction. The friar lands were sold at too high a price making land ownership unattainable for tenants. Through this process, landed elites acquired more land. The American Sugar Corporation benefitted handsomely too. The subsequent introduction of commercial cropping by the United States saw land concentrated in the hands of the few to an even greater extent (Putzel 1992). It is estimated that over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, average tenancy rates rose from 38 to 60 percent. In addition, small land holdings neighboring commercial lands were often lost because the small farmers had neither the money nor influence to successfully take commercial operators to court (Huizer 2001). The dominance of landed elites in the Philippines continued during the Japanese occupation. The Japanese made the decision to not redistribute land in return for landlord allegiance (Putzel 1992). All of these examples support the theory that governing elites are

unlikely to pursue efficient property rights, due to the competitive cost constraint (North 1981).

Following the war, the United States sought a continuation of the status quo; although no longer the colonial master it maintained a strategic and commercial interest in the Philippines. It appeared to be in the United States' interest to uphold a system whereby a few owned the majority of land in the Philippines. Peasants formed the main opposition to the Japanese, while landlords and the military defected. After the war ended it was the latter groups who benefitted from American imperialism. The United States wanted to reestablish export agriculture and upholding the power of the landed elites was the best means to achieve this. The Bell Trade Act, signed in October 1945, reinstated free trade between the Philippines and the United States. The Philippine market was inundated with imports resulting in a foreign exchange deficit. The International Monetary Fund identified this in 1950, stating that free trade was having a negative impact on the Filipino economy as a whole, with only large landowners engaged in export-orientated growth profiting (Putzel 1992).

President Magsaysay went further than most politicians in the Philippines on land reform, explicitly calling for the expropriation of land in a number of his speeches during the 1953 Presidential election. While all three main parties competing in this election talked about their support for land reform, which is not uncommon in Philippine politics, President Magsaysay appeared to be sincerely concerned about the plight of peasants (Starner 1961), but it is difficult to determine if this was more than rhetoric. Ultimately, landlord obstruction meant that President Magsaysay's 1954 land reform legislation was not implemented. President Macapagal's 1963 land reform legislation was not implemented for the same

reason. It is this ability of landed elites to influence, even capture, the Philippines state that provides an insight into why land reform has not occurred in the Philippines.

Despite his rhetoric to the contrary, President Marcos understood that widespread land redistribution was not in his self-interest. The dominance of large landowners continued under President Marcos' rule. His land reform package only impacted the small number of landowners who obstructed his rule and were superfluous to the maintenance of his regime. While he had granted himself emergency powers, it is telling that President Marcos did not use these to speed up the expropriation large estates (Putzel 1992).

The story was similar in post-Marcos Philippines under President Corazon Aquino, who promised to implement land reform during her election campaign. President Aquino had a saintly image in the Philippines and a real opportunity to address the problem of landlessness. Even with emergency powers, she did not successfully legislate for wide-ranging land redistribution. President Aquino, herself a member of a powerful landholding family, did not want to undermine the status quo, which would hurt the economic interests of those closest to her (Fallows 1994). If land redistribution was in the self-interest of Aquino, she could have done more to strengthen the capacity of the state apparatus and the party that she was linked to, which would have given land reform a better chance of succeeding (Kuhonta 2011).

Overall, wide-ranging land reform in the context of the Philippines was not acted on. Economic and social justice arguments in support of land reform did not appear to carry weight with governing elites or landed elites. It was only in times when governing elites' hold on power was tentative, that land reform was presented as a possibility. Under normal circumstances, land reform was not in the self-interest of governing elites in the archipelago.

In Thailand, in the decades following the Second World War, Prime Minister Sanya was under political pressure from farmers and students to reform the rural economy by introducing land reform. The 1975 Thai Agricultural Land Reform Act, disbursed this pressure, but was drafted in such a way as to allow for numerous loopholes. “The law’s designers did not intend for land reform to result in the rapid and forceful seizure of property from large landholders and its redistribution to tenants and laborers” (Ramsay 1982, p. 184). In the following decades, the growth of the Thai economy via conservative means has been prioritized over policies targeting inequality. The Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Thailand, the Bureau of the Budget, and the National Economic and Social Development Board largely followed conservative economic models. “Technocrats have prioritized monetary stability, fiscal restraint, private enterprise, property rights and open trade” (Muscat 1994, p. 65). Testament to the unimportance of equitable land distribution, the Thai Democrat Party initiated limited land reform from 1992 to 1995, but the results of this program did little to improve the lives of the poor. The Democrat Member of Parliament for Phuket, who was heavily involved in the land reform scheme, used her position of power to give land to family members (Kuhonta 2011). Land reform seems to have been of little political benefit to governing elites in Thailand (White 2012).

In the case of South Korea, President Rhee appeared to use land reform to serve his self-interest, protecting the interests of governing elites as much as possible (Ledesma 1980a). Under President Rhee, the debate on the second phase of land reform played out between the landowner-dominated legislature and a reforming executive between 1949 and 1951. It was not to President Rhee’s advantage to allow the landowners’ power to continue unabated, but at the same time he required the support of wealthy landowners to maintain his position (Putzel 1992). Ultimately, President Rhee sponsored the land redistribution

program while protecting those landowners, on whom his power depended, by ensuring that they continued to hold an important place in the new ruling society. President Rhee's hesitancy on land reform was clearly witnessed on both his lobbying against the American driven reform and his behavior in National Assembly debate (Putzel 1992). In the case of South Korea, land reform was implemented in a fashion that appeared to serve the interests of President Rhee and his executive.

In Taiwan, the KMT used land reform to serve its self-interest. Much of its motivation was borne out of a desire to ensure that the events on Mainland China were not replicated on the island. The situation in which the KMT found itself in was different to that of governing elites in the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. The KMT was not reliant on landed elites and was therefore not constrained from implementing land reform.

The evidence presented on the four cases under study supports the assumption that under normal circumstances, land reform is not in the self-interest of governing elites. As per the theory on the politics of land reform, informed by North (1981), it was in the self-interest of governing elites in the Philippines to grant monopoly rights to land both to reduce the cost of administering more complicated property rights and, more significantly, to ensure that powerful landed elites continued to provide their support. While less empirical evidence is available on the Thai case, governing elites have retaliated against those advocating for land reform, marginalized the issue and when limited land redistribution programs have been implemented, they have ensured that family members are among the beneficiaries. It can be argued that governing elites in South Korea and Taiwan were not operating under "normal circumstances". In the case of South Korea, land reform was implemented, but President Rhee tried to protect those large landowners on whom his power depended in line with the competitive constraint theory. In the case of Taiwan, land reform was also implemented, but

governing elites had limited links to landed elites. In this case, the competitive constraint was not an important consideration.

### **Tentative Power**

The evidence supports the assumption that under normal circumstances, land reform is not in the self-interest of governing elites. An exception, however, is that when governing elites' hold on power is tentative, land reform may be a useful tool. It is expected that tentative power, alongside autonomy, is one of two variables that together will be able to best explain the research question.

The evidence drawn from the case of Taiwan demonstrates that if governing elites' hold on power is tentative, land reform is a useful tool. The KMT was cognizant that its hold on power was tentative. The KMT had previously been defeated on Mainland China by Mao's communist forces and had to retreated to Taiwan. The situation on the island was unstable. Having endured and ultimately lost a lengthy civil war with the Communists on Mainland China, the KMT leaders understood the power of land to build legitimacy of the governing class. Governor Chen identified that throughout the course of Chinese history, when the population grew to a point that the land could not sustain it, civil war would break out. During the civil war between the communist and KMT-led nationalist forces, Governor Chen felt that the KMT focused on its military campaign without giving enough thought to the land issue, while the communists skillfully presented themselves as land reformers. In Mao's words: "Whoever wins the support of the peasants will win China; whoever solves the land question will win the peasants" (Mao in Yen-an, 1936 in Ledesma 1980a, p. 329). This allowed the communist's rural base of support to expand immensely, enabling them to defeat the KMT. The failure of the KMT to settle the land issue was equally important as any other factor in its downfall on the Mainland. Governor Chen appears to recognize, at least in



retrospect, that Mainland China's pre-revolutionary system of land tenure had allowed the Communist agitators a chance to mobilize the support of the villages and that this was one of the main reasons why the Chinese Mainland fell into communist hands. Governor Chen witnessed the Communists' use of land reform, alongside other social and economic reforms, to gain broad-based support from the peasants (Tai 1974). Having lost the peasantry to the Communists on the Mainland, the KMT leadership was careful to not ignore the needs of this group on the island of Taiwan.

The KMT's decision to implement land reform was underpinned by the need to build legitimacy and undermine the influence of the communists across the Taiwan straits. Governor Chen worked tirelessly to ensure that land reform was implemented successfully. He energetically lobbied members of the Provincial Assembly, pushed ahead without the support of local leaders, or well-equipped administrative personnel, and was prepared to use violence to achieve his goal (Tai 1974). Governor Chen's determination produced results.

On the eve of rent reduction in Taiwan, the situation on the Chinese mainland was becoming critical and the villages on the island were showing signs of unrest and instability...with the implementation of rent reduction, the livelihoods of the broad masses of the farming population was immediately improved. The Chinese Communists were effectively deprived of propagandistic weapons by a new social order that had arisen in the rural areas (Governor Cheng Chen quoted in Tai 1974, p. 87).

The politically unstable situation in which the KMT found itself in and its decisive action provide solid evidence to support the assumption that if the power of governing elites is tentative, land reform can be a useful tool. In the case of Taiwan, not only was land reform implemented, it was forced through by the KMT, which had the most to lose should it have failed, further fanning the flames of rebellion amongst peasants on the island.

The case of South Korea provides further evidence in support of the assumption that land reform is a useful tool if governing elites' hold on power is tentative. The Korean War resulted in the communist forces in the north of the Korean Peninsula threatening governing elites, landlords and anti-communist forces led by the American Military Government in the south. While similar to Taiwan, the South Korea case study provides an added dimension. In this case, the concept of governing elites can be broadened to include the United States and its allies.

The broader geopolitical ramifications of the Korean War saw the southern part of the peninsula become a bastion against the spread of communism throughout Asia. Land reform was implemented not only to secure power nationally, but also to create a platform for the United States to reassert its hegemony in the region. Given the strategic importance of the Korean Peninsula, it is therefore unsurprising that external actors played a key role in the redistribution of land in the south. The United States provided political and economic support to the south and was strongly in favor of land reform. The American Military Government carried out the first wave of land reform in 1946 and urged the National Assembly to pass legislation in 1949 and 1950 to complete the land redistribution program (Putzel 1992).

Leaving the international dimension aside, the threat posed by communist forces in the north to governing elites in the south saw land redistribution written into the new constitution and supported across the political spectrum once the state of South Korea was officially created. All political parties pledged to implement land reform during the first election of 1948, a policy platform previously unheard of (Hong 2001 in You 2014). President Rhee grudgingly supported land reform as a means to consolidate his power (Putzel 1992). Recognizing the value of land reform, President Rhee, an ardent anti-communist, selected

former communist Cho Bong-am as Minister of Agriculture to draft liberal land reform legislation. While Korean Democratic Party members attempted to increase compensation for landlords to 300 percent of annual produce, the National Assembly passed the Land Reform Bill and President Rhee signed it into law in 1950 with total compensation at 150 percent (Kim 2001 in You 2014). The threat posed by the communists in the north was perceived to be greater than the need to placate landed elites.

Landlords in the south also recognized that it would be in their best interests to seek a compromise with governing elites and peasants to ensure that they did not lose everything in a communist uprising. In cases across the world, land reform has been legislated for, but has often failed at the implementation stage. The experience of the Korean War convinced many landowners to accept land reform. As a group, their influence in Korean society was also under threat because they had collaborated with the Japanese during the Second World War (Putzel 1992). The opportunity to at least receive some compensation for their land and to not be questioned in any detail by governing elites for their unsavory past behavior led to a willing compromise. Landlords sold a total of 500,000 hectares to tenants in 1948 and 1949, while the government redistributed 330,000 hectares after the Land Reform Act of 1950. Landlords were largely trying to speed up what was an inevitable shift (Hong 2001 in You 2014). Overall, land reform proved to be a remarkably popular policy tool in the case of South Korea. Such was the threat to South Korea's western allies, governing elites and landed elites, all three groups worked together to implement wide-ranging land reform to reinforce their vulnerable position.

The case of Thailand also offers evidence in support of the assumption that if governing elites' hold on power is tentative, land reform can become a useful tool. The Sanya Government, under significant political pressure from farmers and students, legislated for

land reform via the 1975 Land Reform Act. Students mobilized poorer farmers to call for improved conditions. They played a critical role in organizing farmers across the country and ensuring their participation en masse at demonstrations (Ramsay 1982). While Thai governing elites appear to have been aware of the threat posed by farmers, they calculated that it was not so large as to require them to challenge existing power structures in the countryside. They instead chose to allow landed elites to repress students and farmers who had demanded land reform. The student movement was undermined by internal conflict and repression and increasingly became less helpful to the cause of land reform. Farmers were, however, victims of the most brutal retaliation from landed elites. Over the course of a few months in 1975, 22 activist farmers were assassinated. The uninterested Thai police did not identify the perpetrators of these murders (Ramsay 1982). The Sanya Government ultimately passed land reform legislation, but the efforts of elites to repress those calling for land reform saw political pressure diminish and the legislation remain unimplemented. Without political pressure, instability in the countryside was no longer deemed a threat to future Thai governments; they did not deem it necessary to redistribute land.

In the case of the Philippines, the power of governing elites came under greater threat than in Thailand. Filipino leaders have frequently used the promise of land reform to quell rural instability, but have never implemented it. The Hukbalahap guerilla movement was the largest threat facing the Philippines following the Second World War (Tai 1974). This was a view shared by governing elites domestically and by the United States. The Hukbalahap guerilla movement had mounted the resistance against the Japanese during the war, unlike the landed elites who were enablers of Japanese rule. They had redistributed land to peasants during the war, but it was swiftly returned to wealthy landowners following Japanese surrender (Putzel 1992). The Hukbalahap guerilla movement was able to exploit the land issue and force the Magsaysay Administration to seriously consider implementing

wide-ranging land reform, which culminated in the Philippine Congress passing legislation in 1954. Due to landlord obstruction, this legislation was never implemented.

Like South Korea, the Philippine archipelago was of strategic importance to the United States. In a confidential report authored by the National Security Council in 1949, the Philippines, Japan and the Ryukyus Islands were considered as the “first line of defense and...[the] first line of offense from which we may seek to reduce the area of Communist control” (quoted in Putzel 1992, p. 84). A second United States National Security Council report issued in 1950 stated, “The security interests of the United States require that the Philippines become and remain stable, anti-communist, and pro-American” (quoted in Putzel 1992, p.84). In reality, the Hukbalahap guerilla movement was a peasant rebellion fueled by domestic unrest and not part of the international communist movement (Putzel 1992). In the Cold War environment, this was not to say that United States did not deem the guerilla movement and the associated rural discontent, to be any less of a threat to its interests.

The United States sent a number of officials to the Philippines to investigate the drivers of unrest, including Undersecretary of the Treasury, Daniel Bell. Upon completing his survey of the Philippines in 1950, Bell suggested that extensive land redistribution was the only answer to rural discontent. The following year, the United States Mutual Security Agency appointed Robert Hardie to report on the tenancy situation in the Philippines. Like Bell, Hardie also recommended comprehensive land reform:

In championing the cause of tenants, communism wins their sympathies – just as governments, careless of causes – whose actions are limited to the suppression of symptoms and maintenance of the status quo – are bound to win their enmity...Because of these defects, the land tenure system stands as an obstacle, wasting all efforts of the United States

to foster the development of a stable democratic economy” (Hardie Report, p. 7 in Putzel 1992).

At the same time, the United States sent Colonel Edward Lansdale to lead a counterinsurgency campaign against the Hukbalahap Rebellion, which proved successful. With the threat posed by the Hukbalahap guerilla movement diminished, the United States lost interest in land reform.

Despite the geopolitical environment and domestic rebellion led by the Hukbalahap guerilla movement, governing elites in the Philippines and the United States did not deem the threat serious enough to warrant land redistribution. Putzel (1992) has argued that the Philippines never faced a threat of the same magnitude as those endangering stability in Taiwan and South Korea and that is why land reform was not implemented there. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine which of the cases under study faced the largest threat and it is difficult to analyze what would have happened in the Philippines if Lansdale’s counterinsurgency program not been as effective. While the Hukbalahap guerilla movement appears to have been the greatest threat to the stability of the Philippine State during the period under study, the ongoing issue of landlessness and poverty alone has had the potential to undermine the Philippine state and power of the traditional landed families who control it.

The simmering discontent among the peasantry had the momentum to threaten President Marcos’ hold on power and the autocrat's rhetoric reflected this, “The land reform program is the only gauge for the success or failure of the New Society. If land reform fails, there is no New Society” (SEADAG Reports 1975 in Ledesma 1980a, p. 332). The Marcos Administration created a convincing narrative around the need for land reform, but in reality his reform program made little difference to peasants. Aside from using land reform to build their

support bases via grand statements, governing elites in the Philippines appear to have felt both legally and militarily secure. They were able to contain the peasant movement through rural development programs and a strong military (Putzel 1992). It may have been that far-reaching land reform was impossible in a country where the landed elites not only co-opted governments, but throughout much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the government.

In 1986 the People Power Revolution ended President Marcos' 21-year rule. Newly elected President Aquino placed land reform at the top of her agenda. President Aquino's government's hold on power was threatened by communist insurgency and this appears to be the driving force behind her desire to implement land reform (Riedinger 1995). According to the Aquino Administration's taskforce on agrarian reform:

An analysis of the land distribution problem in the Philippines shows that its roots lie in the abuse of state prerogatives to grant land to the powerful and, hence, socially undeserving few. Thus, the land reform issue has given the subversive movement its most alluring talking point to attract the landless poor. The regime in its bid for peace and reconciliation has made genuine land reform a high priority" (quoted in Riedinger 1995, p. 120).

Like the Philippine leaders who had gone before her, both democratic and authoritarian, President Aquino used the promise of land reform to establish new links with the rural masses to strengthen her influence and suppress the threat of communist insurgency to her rule. Land reform remained a promise; it was never effectively implemented. The case study of the Philippines supports the assumption that if governing elites' hold on power is tentative then land reform can be a useful tool. Governing elites in the Philippines were frequently threatened and saw land reform as a means to reinforce their power, but they never implemented it.

The evidence presented across the four cases supports the assumption that if governing elites' hold on power is tentative land reform can be a useful tool. As expected, there is strong evidence in support of this assumption in the cases of Taiwan and South Korea. Governing elites in both cases were in highly vulnerable positions; they decided to implement land reform to build legitimacy, reinforcing their hold on power. The evidence from the Thai case also offers support for the assumption. Governing elites' hold on power in Thailand was tentative at times and land reform was considered a viable policy to address this. Ultimately, governing elites in the kingdom calculated that their position was secure enough and that land reform was not in their self-interest. Governing elites in the Philippines made a similar decision. The position of governing elites in the Philippines came under greater threat than the position of those in Thailand. It may be that although the position of governing elites in the Philippines was more vulnerable than in Thailand, the threat to governing elites in the former was still not large enough to tip the scales in favor of land reform. On the other hand, there is a question around whether governing elites were able to perceive threat to the same extent as others given the centrality of land to elite dominance in the archipelago. This question is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is interesting.

## Regime Type

The relationship between regime type and the implementation of land reform does not appear to have explanatory power, but it is important to eliminate a counter variable in order to substantiate the theory on the politics of land reform. Evidence is presented on the Philippine and South Korea cases, as both grappled with the question of land reform under different regime types.



The Philippines has grappled with land issues since the Spanish colonial period and over time it has experienced various regime types. This makes it a good case to test the assumption that regime type is unlikely to determine the extent of land reform. Focusing on the period following the Second World War, the Philippines has been led by elected and non-elected governments.<sup>10</sup> Neither elected nor authoritarian regimes have resulted in the implementation of land reform. It has been argued that authoritarian rulers are more insulated from society and therefore able to implement ambitious projects that have the potential to undermine powerful vested interests. In the case of the Philippines, “the Marcos years proved that an authoritarian form of government has no special proclivity toward reform implementation” (Putzel 1992, p. 374). Under Marcos the Philippine state did not become more autonomous from society. In the Philippines ‘personal-clientist’ linkages govern how resources are distributed (Manasca and Tan 2012), or in the context of this thesis, how land is distributed and utilized. “The effect of the authoritarian period on the politico-economic system was to change it from neo-patrimonial (outsiders plundering the state) to a system where a new set of predators beholden to a national overlord pillaged the state from within” (Manasca and Tan 2012 p. 61).

In the Philippines, society and the landed elites who dominate it are stronger than the state. If these powerful members of Philippine society decide that land reform will work against their interests they will ensure that the status quo is upheld, as has been the case since

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<sup>10</sup> While elections occurred, Philippine governance in the period following the Second World War up until the declaration of Martial Law under President Marcos in 1972 is most appropriately termed “constitutional” rather than “democratic” (see Wurfel in Riedinger 1995). Riedinger elaborates, “This terminology emphasizes the preoccupation of the Philippines political elite with legal processes rather than widespread power sharing. Reflecting their common origin, there was little of substance, composition, or constituencies to distinguish the two leading parties, the Nacionlista Party and the Liberal Party. Each party was built upon vertically linked patron-client networks. Party switching was frequent as national, provincial and local leaders sought advantage in access to government resources. Indeed, both Magsaysay and Marcos switched parties shortly before their respective nominations and elections to the presidency. The parties were noted more for their personalities than for ideological or issue orientation. Elections were typically marred by violence and fraud” (1995, p. 23). When elections resumed following the People Power movement in 1986, they continued to be conservative devices to reelect established politicians.

independence. Philippine society will continue to influence both elected and unelected governing elites to pursue its interests.

It is also useful to study South Korea to test the assumption that regime type is unlikely to explain why land reform occurred in some cases, but not others. The American Military Government implemented the first wave of land reform. President Rhee implemented the second wave of land reform. The American Military Government was an unelected occupying force, while President Rhee and his executive were elected, albeit indirectly.<sup>11</sup> The considerable threat posed by communist forces in the north led both the American Military Government and President Rhee's administration to implement land reform; building legitimacy for a capitalist, West facing South Korea. The transition from military government imposed by an outside occupier, to an elected system of government, did not change the political calculation around the need to redistribute land.

The evidence presented on the Philippines and South Korea supports the assumption that regime type is unlikely to determine the extent of land reform. The Philippine example demonstrates that the degree of autonomy between governing elites and landed elites is more likely to determine the extent of land reform than the type of regime. While in the case of South Korea, it is governing elites' tentative hold on power that makes the implementation of land reform conceivable.

### Governing Autonomy

The final assumption of the theory is that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform. It is expected that

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<sup>11</sup> President Rhee was elected by member of the Constitutional Assembly in July 1948 and charged with overseeing the transfer of power from the American Military Government to the Government of Korea. The Constitutional Assembly elections were held in May 1948 and overseen by the American Military Government. Recorded turnout was high at 95.5 percent.

autonomy, alongside tentative power, together have the most explanatory power. Evidence from the Philippine experience has been utilized to test this assumption, where the state has been captured by landed elites resulting in the failure of governing elites to redistribute land. Governing elites have no autonomy from landed elites. Landed elites buy political influence to stop land reform programs, in many instances, families that own large swathes of land in the archipelago dominate politics. The capture of the Philippine state by landed elites means that it is often not necessary for them to lobby governing elites to protect their interests, as they are one and the same (Abueva 1965; Stauffer 1966 in You 2014, p. 207).

When landed elites are not in government in the Philippines, they buy political influence. Throughout the period under study, politics of the Philippines is underpinned by a system of patronage. Candidates in congressional and presidential elections rely on powerful families to garner popular support. In turn, they expect governing elites to legislate in their interest. Political parties are vehicles for elites to gain influence and power. Stable issue based parties that might have functioned to represent the poor are not part of the political landscape in the Philippines. While patronage networks provide an ongoing means to influence governing elites, when popular demand for land reform arises, which it does frequently, landed elites flex their muscles to an even greater degree. During the passage of the 1955 Land Reform Bill the Philippine National Rice Producers Association (NRPA) aggressively opposed the legislation on behalf of landed elites:

The top officials of the NRPA not only were able to bombard individual congressmen with letters, mimeographed statements, and proposed amendments without limitation, but they could also attempt to influence legislative votes through a variety of personal contacts and could even exert pressure while the measure was under discussion, members of the NRPA appeared personally in the gallery of the House to invite congressmen to a social function for an Association official. In addition, officials of the Rice Producers took prominent positions in the gallery whenever the bill was about to be called upon for discussion; when critical action

on the measure was under way, they frequently summoned congressmen from their seats, or intercepted them as they entered the session hall, to confer on the bill's status and to influence, if possible, the action on the bill (Starner 1961, p. 164-165).

With such aggressive lobbying techniques, it is unsurprising that the potency of the 1955 Land Reform Bill was diluted. While other groups representing landed interests were less forceful in their methods, they did have lobbyists in the Philippine Congress (Starner 1961). Had President Magsaysay not pushed the Philippine Congress to pass the bill as a matter of urgency, it would have likely fallen over altogether. Many in the Philippine Congress had a hard decision to make. Congressmen had the choice to either accept a land reform program that their patrons vehemently opposed, or stop the legislation and upset a highly regarded President. Ultimately, many Congressmen chose to support the legislation. Despite the influence and importance of landed interests, electorally their position was vulnerable if they turned against Magsaysay (Tai 1974). Importantly, they were also well aware that the signing of the Land Reform Act was merely one step and that the implementation of this legislation would provide many additional opportunities for landed elites to intervene.

Beyond networks of patronage and powerful lobby groups, landed elites have directly infiltrated the Philippine state to pursue their self-interest (You 2014). Apart from the period of authoritarian rule under President Marcos and President Duterte's recent election, traditional landed families have dominated politics. For example, following the People Power Revolution, close to 85 percent of representatives elected to Congress in 1987 belonged to 'traditional clans' (Mojares 1993 in You 2014). The Philippine bureaucracy too has been captured by landed interests. It is patrimonial and oligarchic as opposed to autonomous and meritocratic (Hutchcroft 1998 in You 2014). While in theory entrance to the Philippine bureaucracy is by competitive exam, "bureau directors and division chiefs

received appropriations from the legislature in exchange for appointing friends, relatives and needy constituents of Congressmen” (Wurfel 1988, p. 78-79 in You 2014).

The politics of land reform can be characterized as a story of continuation throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not one of change. The Philippine military, like the bureaucracy, is part of the prevailing class alignment in the country (Putzel 1992). Patterns of landed elites buying political influence and capturing the Philippine state were only slightly impeded under President Marcos’ military dictatorship:

The US Government, the World Bank and Marcos himself attempted to portray the martial law regime as one in which technocrats and the military had a new role to play within a state committed to modernization. In fact, many of those portrayed as ‘technocrats’ were no more than representatives of the vested interests of the business community, and are better understood as a group within the oligarchy than a class apart (Putzel 1992, p. 143).

While on the surface President Marcos claimed that a program of land reform would be at the heart of the ‘New Society’, in reality nothing changed for tenants and agricultural laborers. A small number of powerful traditional landed elites lost their land under President Marcos, but landed interests were still well represented in his inner circle. Even President Marcos himself became an important landowner. Because the Philippine State has been captured by landed interests since colonial times, President Marcos found it easier to preserve his power by aligning himself with landed elites as opposed to implementing real land reform that would undermine their interests (You 2014, p. 210). In summary: “The socio-economic consequences of agrarian reform in the Philippines have been ambivalent at best, and often times self-contradictory – i.e. beneficial to those who were to be expropriated, and prejudicial to those who were to be the beneficiaries” (Ledesma 1980a, p. 328).

Following the People Power Revolution that ousted President Marcos, President Aquino pledged to carry out land reform but focused on restoring democracy and shaping the new Philippine constitution. President Aquino also restored the political influence of traditional Philippine political and economic elites. As they had been in the past, democratic institutions in the Philippines became elite-dominated and unreceptive to meaningful land reform (Riedinger 1995).

Not only did President Aquino restore the power of traditional Philippine elites, she did not give forceful direction to land reform. As President, she had the ability to decree that wide-ranging land reform be implemented, but she deferred to the Philippine Congress, which lowered the ambition of the land reform program:

At each stage in the deliberations over the reform, the scope of the proposed program was successfully reduced. Perhaps the greatest triumph of the anti-reform forces was getting Aquino to defer to the legislature, landed interests were particularly effective in exercising direct and indirect influence to weaken the reform program and tailor exemptions and exceptions to the program. The result is program limited in scope, to be implemented over a decade or more-ample time for further weakening or reversal of the reform process (Riedinger 1995, p. 176).

Many looked to President Aquino's actions regarding her family plantation, Hacienda Luisita, as a signal of her sincerity to usher in serious reform. President Aquino herself noted during her presidential campaign, "I shall ask no greater sacrifices than I myself am prepared to make" (quoted in Riedinger 1995, p. 139). The reform law contained a provision on corporate stock distributions, which were an alternative to redistributing land to the farmworkers that cultivated it. The corporate stock distributions would see farmworkers receive one-third minority stock shares at no cost. "Analysis suggests that the workers would be no worse off, indeed might be substantially better off, if they were to purchase the land assets of Hacienda Luisita under the terms of the reform law rather than accept the

proposed 'no cost' stock distribution" (Riedinger 1989 in Riedinger 1995, p. 180). When President Aquino elected to take the stock distribution option for Hacienda Luisita, pro-reformers took this as a further sign of her insincerity (Riedinger 1995). President Aquino's efforts to consolidate her regime would have been significantly threatened by landed elites and the military had she pushed for comprehensive land reform (Riedinger 1995).

Another example of President Aquino's failure to advance land reform was the decision to redistribute idle public land, followed by tenanted land used to grow rice and corn, instead of including all agricultural and horticultural sectors in the reform program's scope. The Minister of Agrarian Reform, Heherson T Alvarez, suggested that the land reform program be expanded to include sugar and coconut sectors, however, Ramon Mitra, the Minister of Agriculture at the time and owner of large cattle and sugar holdings, strongly opposed this. Minister Mitra asserted that the average sugarcane and coconut farms were small and therefore inappropriate for reform. President Aquino sided with Minister Mitra in this debate and sugarcane and coconut holdings were left untouched by reform (Gilding 1993 in Riedinger 1995).

As expected, peasants have not had a meaningful influence on the land reform process in the Philippines:

As the reformist and anti-reformist forces squared off, the Philippine masses remained, to a considerable degree, marginal to the political life of the country. Their ability to influence public debate was limited, a function of their limited resources and the difficulties attendant on forming and sustaining independent social organizations during the Marcos era (Riedinger 1995, p. 138).

Based the size of the peasant population, peasants might have been expected to dominate politics and set the reform agenda, but this did not happen. During Aquino's presidential

campaign, it is likely that many peasants were simply unaware of her pledge to implement land reform. President Marcos had tightly controlled the media, which meant that during Aquino's presidential campaign and beyond, villagers had limited access to information (Mydans 1986a in Riedinger 1995). According to estimates, up to 90 percent of Philippine peasants were not organized (Montemayor 1987 in Riedinger 1995). Peasants were more likely to be influenced by their patron's behavior and views, than they were by Aquino's reform pledges, when they voted in the 1986 presidential election (Riedinger 1995).

Not only were peasants unlikely to be organized politically or have access to independent sources of media commentary, their ability to advocate for themselves forcefully was curtailed by the presence of private armies, owned by landed elites. Private armies and Civilian Home Defense Forces, which were established during martial law, were considered to be the worst abusers of human rights. President Marcos supporters Eduardo Cojuangco (Aquino's cousin) and Armando Gustillo kept vast private armies of 1,600 and 1,200 men, respectively. In 1985, members of a unit on Gustillo's payroll opened fire on peasants protesting, killing around 30 and wounding many more (Riedinger 1995).

Philippine politics is elite driven and a large number of elites draw their wealth and power from the land. Numerous attempts have been made to implement land reform and each time these have failed. While elite power has often been tentative in the archipelago, the balance of forces within society has been significantly weighted in favor of landed interests, which has resulted in meaningful land reform being thwarted over the decades. Peasants have no effective means to participate in politics. Parties emerge around leaders prior to elections and strong patronage networks mobilize voters, not infrequently via coercive means. The corrupt nature of Philippine party politics sees peasants silenced, unable provide an effective counter balance to the power of landed elites. As such, it is clear that the



relationship between governing elites and landed elites is more likely to determine the extent of land reform. In countries or regions where land reform is required, peasants are likely to be too constrained to influence change.

Landed elites have and continue to dominate the Philippine State. “The flow and dynamics of Philippine economic policy and the way oligarchs capture the state have not been interrupted through regime change and democratization in the Philippines. Democratization has failed to foster significant economic change because the institutional design since 1986 has not enabled a strong republic to develop” (Manacsa and Tan 2012, p. 76). Far reaching land reform would certainly weaken the power of landed elites and strengthen the state, but only a strong state could implement such a policy. As long as landed elites have captured the Philippine State, meaningful land reform remains unlikely.

In the case of Thailand, the state has been partially captured by landed elites. Governing elites have a limited autonomy from this important sector of society. The “Thai state is more embedded than autonomous, but has a strong centralist ideology as well as considerable popular prestige on traditional grounds” (White 2012, p. 577). While landed families in Thailand do not have the same status and power of those in the Philippines, they are still influential. The Thai Land Reform Act in 1975 demonstrates this. The Sanya Government established Farmers’ Assistance Committees to help farmers get their land back that they had lost, but student representatives on these committees argued that other representatives were heavily predisposed to the wishes of the landed elite. The Government representatives on the Farmers’ Assistance Committees enjoyed hospitality provided by landed elites when they visited a region to consider peasant grievances. The landed elites used their influence to stop tenants and laborers from taking their grievances to the

committees. Landed elites “also had their nak leng or ‘young toughs’, harass the student members of the committees” (Ramsay 1982, p. 186).

More broadly, the nak leng network was used as a tool to maintain order and preserve the power of landed elites in the countryside. The use of coercion by the nak leng “network is not likely to be challenged lightly, either by democratically elected governments who use it to help deliver votes, or by military governments who rely on it to help maintain stability” (Ramsay 1982, p. 186). As such, when governing elites and bureaucrats reach the village level, they tend to cooperate with landed elites and maintain the status quo. When the issue of land reform did feature in Thai politics, it was not implemented due to landed interests. The case of Thailand supports the assumption that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform.

In the case of South Korea, the American Military Government was insulated from landed elites. It implemented the first wave of land reform to ensure that the communists in the north of the peninsula did not infiltrate the south and had little regard for the interests of landed elites, who had colluded with their Japanese occupiers. President Rhee’s government did not, however, enjoy the same autonomy from landed elites. When Korean War broke out, President Rhee lost much of his popularity and he considered ways in which he could maintain his power and safeguard South Korea from the newly formed Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the north of the Korean Peninsula. Land reform was a means to achieve this (Putzel 1992). Governing elites who would normally be opposed to land redistribution tried to appeal to peasants by advocating for such a policy (You 2014). When governing elites’ hold on power is tentative, they have a more autonomy to pursue policies that would, under normal circumstances, be unpopular with landed elites. The latter recognize that compromise is required to avoid the alternative: the collapse of the regime altogether and

with it their own positions of influence and their security. Land reform swept into South Korean society, in what was a 'historic moment of choice' (Putzel 1992). In South Korea, the political situation was extremely threatening. The experience of the Korean War convinced many landed elites to accept and even aid in the implementation of land reform. They were largely grateful for the opportunity to receive at least some compensation for their land. Landed elites sold a total of 500,000 hectares to tenants in 1948 and 1949, while the government redistributed 330,000 hectares after the Land Reform Act in 1950. The degree of threat facing the regime, and landed elites, gave President Rhee the autonomy required to implement land reform. The theory on the politics of land reform developed in Chapter Three does not explore the idea that governing autonomy is subject to change over time, but this was witnessed in the case of South Korea.

Unlike the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea, governing elites in Taiwan were insulated from landed elites. Political power was concentrated in the hands of the KMT following the Second World War. Having fled Mainland China, the KMT were newcomers to the island. Taiwanese landowners could not be counted among the ranks of the KMT leadership and given their past indiscretions, namely colluding with the Japanese, landed elites had limited influence in post-war Taiwan. The KMT ensured that landowners did not have the political channels to undermine the adoption of land reform programs nor their implementation. The program of land reform was designed by the KMT, through the Executive Yuan (cabinet), and the Provincial Council (executive branch of the Provisional Government), with limited involvement of the national and provincial legislatures. "Of all of these organs, only the Provincial Assembly had some representation from landed interests. But the Assembly was the least influential, possessing only advisory or consultative functions" (Tai 1974, p. 91). While the KMT's tentative hold on power motivated it to implement land reform, it was able to do so effectively because it was autonomous from landed elites.

The evidence presented supports the assumption that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform. The experience of the Philippines provides extensive supporting evidence. Since the end of the Second World War up until present day, governing elites have not been autonomous from landed elites and these two groups have merged to the extent that the majority of governing elites have significant land holdings. While land reform has been central to Philippine politics throughout the period under study, the capture of the state by landed elites has meant that meaningful reform has not taken place. Landed families in Thailand do not enjoy the same status and power of their Philippine cousins, but they are still a powerful group within society. Governing elites have relied upon them to uphold their rule and calculated that implementing land reform in the kingdom would not be in their self-interest. In the case of South Korea, the position of both governing elites and landed elites was under threat. A consensus emerged among governing and landed elites to redistribute land. While society in South Korea was structured in a similar way to Thailand and the Philippines, with landed elites wielding significant influence over governing elites, the threat posed by the communist north during Rhee's presidency gave him the required autonomy to implement land reform. Unlike the cases of the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea, Taiwan and the American Military Government in Korea were insulated from landed elites, which meant that they were able to implement land reform. These and other findings from Chapter Four will be discussed further in the following chapter.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion & Discussion

This thesis sets out to understand why land reform, which has been found to reduce poverty and provide a basis for equitable development, has not been effectively implemented in many parts of the world. It asks why in the decades following the Second World War wide-ranging land reform was implemented in Taiwan and South Korea, but not the Philippines or Thailand. Chapter Two of the thesis examined the existing body of literature on the politics of land reform. It concluded that while a number of attempts have been made to explain variation in land reform implementation, some contributions are stronger than others. Hung-chao Tai (1974) provided the most convincing answer to the research question, which focused on the relationship between legitimacy building and class coalitions. Chapter Three drew on useful scholarship, including Tai's work, to build a theory on the politics of land reform, develop hypotheses and discuss methodology. Finally, Chapter Four analyzed each assumption drawing on empirical evidence from secondary source material.

### Findings

The empirical evidence supports the theory that this thesis developed on the politics of land reform. Four key assumptions underpin the theory: firstly, that under normal circumstances, land reform is unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites; secondly, if governing elites' hold on power is tentative, land reform may be a useful tool; thirdly, that regime type is unlikely to determine the extent of land reform; and lastly, that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform. Overall, it was expected that land reform is unlikely to be implemented unless governing

elites' hold on power is tentative and they have sufficient autonomy from landed elites to carry out their reform program.

The first assumption, that under normal circumstances, land reform is unlikely to be in the self-interest of governing elites, was well supported by the evidence. In the Philippines, the unequal distribution of land has served generations of governing elites. It has been in the self-interest of governing elites in the Philippines to grant monopoly rights to land, both to reduce the cost of administering more complicated property rights regimes and, significantly, to ensure that powerful landed elites continue to support successive Philippine governments. In Thailand, land reform was legislated for in 1975 when Prime Minister Sanya came under pressure from students and farmers to implement agrarian reform. It was drafted in such a way as to allow for numerous loopholes, upholding the system of patronage that had been advantageous for governing elites in Thailand. In South Korea, President Rhee's hold on power was tentative, which made land reform an almost necessary step to take. Sponsoring the land redistribution program aligned with his self-interest and that of landed elites, whose position in society depended upon the continuity of President Rhee's capitalist regime. Lastly, in Taiwan, the KMT had limited connections to landed elites and thus did not rely on them to maintain power. It was in the self-interest of the KMT to implement land reform to legitimize its rule.

The empirical evidence across the four cases supports the second assumption, that if the power of governing elites is unstable, land reform can be a useful tool. The relationship between regime threat and reform was relatively well documented in the existing literature on land reform. A number of theorists state that threat provides an adequate explanation of variance in land reform, but this thesis argues that it only provides a partial explanation. If

governing elites' hold on power is tentative, then land reform can be a useful tool, but ultimately it will only be implemented if governing elites are autonomous from landed elites.

In the case of Taiwan, the KMT was cognizant that its hold on power was tentative. It had already lost Mainland China to Mao's communist forces and saw land reform as a means to build legitimacy for its rule. It also saw land reform as a tool to undermine the influence of communist forces seeking to infiltrate villages from across the Taiwan Straits. The case of South Korea provides the strongest evidence in support of this assumption. Unlike in Taiwan, President Rhee and other governing elites were reliant on landed elites to maintain their hold on power, however, the threat posed by communist forces in the north was such that governing elites were able to write land redistribution into the new constitution. This step received support from across the political spectrum and even landed elites themselves assisted with its implementation, such was their fear that they would otherwise lose everything. The case of Thailand, unlike the preceding two, demonstrates what happens when governing elites consider their hold on power to be more secure. Under significant pressure from farmers and students, governing elites in Thailand legislated for land reform. Nevertheless, they later calculated that the threat posed was limited and decided against implementation to avoid upsetting power structures in the countryside that served their interests.

The Philippines has only witnessed very limited land redistribution, but unlike Thailand, governing elites hold on power was often tentative. In the 1950s, the Hukbalahap guerilla movement, which exploited the land issue, was deemed a threat to governing elites and American geo-strategic interests. The Magsaysay Administration and the United States Government seriously considered implementing wide-ranging land reform, but decided against this. The peasant movement, that had been bubbling away, gained momentum

when President Marcos assumed power, while a similar communist insurgency threatened President Aquino and the newly constituted Philippine state. All leaders made promises to implement wide-ranging land reform, but did not follow through on this. Some theorists argue that the threat faced by governing elites in the Philippines was not as great as that faced by Taiwan or South Korea, but the ongoing issue of landlessness and poverty has the potential to undermine the Philippine state and those who control it. In the case of the Philippines, it is not so much that governing elites' hold on power has not been tentative. Land reform was not implemented in the Philippines because the state has been captured by landed elites. As a result of state capture, governing elites appear reluctant to address the issue of landlessness.

The evidence available is supportive of the third assumption, that regime type is unlikely to determine the extent of land reform. While this assumption is not central to the theory on the politics of land reform, the correlation between regime type and land reform implementation was analyzed in order to eliminate a counter theory that runs through the literature. A preoccupation with binary categorization can lead theorists to overlook more nuanced variables, which is why this thesis focuses on power structures within societies, rather than regime type. The Philippines has experienced periods of constitutional rule, authoritarianism and democracy, yet the story of land reform, or lack thereof, remains the same under each. President Marcos, an authoritarian ruler, was no more insulated from landed elites than elected presidents who went before and after him. In the Philippines, society is stronger than the state and regime type has not changed this. The case of South Korea provides further evidence in support of this assumption. Both an outside occupying force in the form of the American Military Government and President Rhee's elected government calculated that land reform was necessary and aligned with their respective interests.



The final assumption, that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform, is found to carry explanatory weight. This assumption draws on a truism of politics, that no group of elites will legislate themselves out of power. As such, this thesis finds that there is a correlation between the source of governing elites' power and the policies that they choose to implement. When governing elites rely on landed elites to uphold their power, they will be unlikely to implement land reform.

The Philippines provides strong evidence in support of this final assumption. Throughout the period under study, the Philippine state has been captured by landed elites. Landed elites in the archipelago use patronage networks to buy political influence to stop or dilute land reform programs, or often dominate politics themselves. Noteworthy reforms legislated for by President Magsaysay, President Marcos and President Aquino all met with the same fate because Philippine society, dominated by landed elites, was more powerful than the state. While landed elites in Thailand do not have the same status and power of those in the Philippines, they are still influential and relied upon by governing elites to maintain order and deliver votes. Like the Philippines, governing elites in Thailand did not have the requisite autonomy from landed elites to implement land reform.

Governing elites in Taiwan were autonomous from landed elites. Landed elites had limited influence over the land redistribution program because the KMT did not rely on them to perpetuate its rule. Instead, as a retreating occupying force, it needed to broaden its bases of support in society to include tenant farmers and farm laborers to consolidate its regime. South Korea is perhaps the most interesting case to test the assumption that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land

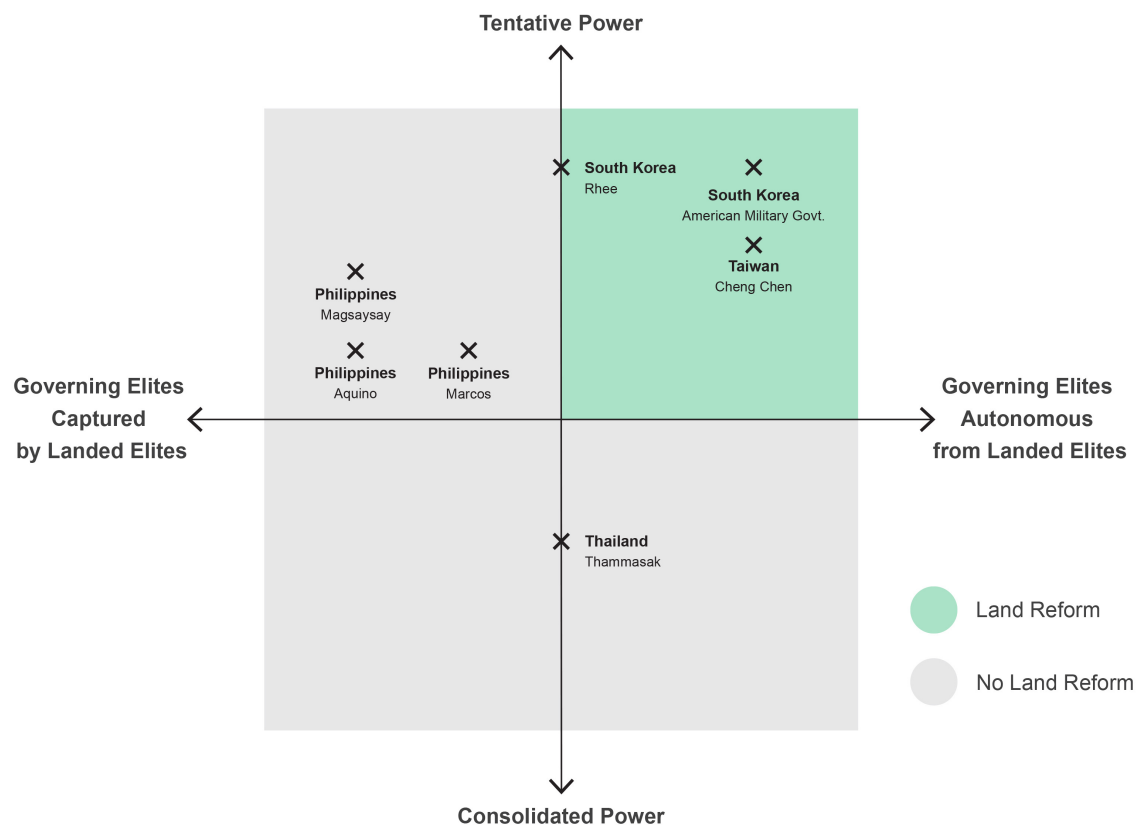
reform. The American Military Government, which instituted the first phase of land reform in South Korea, was autonomous from landed elites. President Rhee's Government, which introduced wide-ranging land redistribution, did not, however, enjoy the same degree of autonomy. When Rhee became President, governing elites in South Korea were reliant on landed elites, however, the unstable political situation threatened the position of both. Land reform became a necessary tool, with a consensus emerging among governing and landed elites to redistribute land. The threat posed by the communist north gave President Rhee the required autonomy to implement land reform. The case of South Korea demonstrates that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is subject to change. Under normal circumstances, President Rhee would not have had the autonomy required to implement land reform.

The findings of this thesis suggest that tentative power and governing autonomy can be interdependent. In South Korea, the threat of a communist revolution created an environment in which the government's hold on power was tentative and the position and security of landed elites was uncertain. It was the specific political context that gave President Rhee the autonomy to implement land reform that he would not have otherwise had. In contrast to South Korea, the case of the Philippines demonstrates that the capture of the state by landed interests constrained governing elites from addressing the tentative nature of their power. Governing elites were beholden to landed elites and had significant landed interests of their own, which may have resulted in a failure to identify their at times vulnerable position. It would be interesting to explore further the impact state capture has had on governing elites' ability to perceive threat in the archipelago.

The findings of this thesis also reinforce the need to place case studies within a range when testing them against variables, such as state autonomy and tentative power. The extent to

which governing elites' hold on power is tentative is always a matter of degree, as is the extent to which governing elites are autonomous from landed elites. *Figure IV: Theory on the Politics of Land Reform* illustrates the findings of this thesis: that land reform is unlikely to be implemented unless governing elites' hold on power is tentative and they have sufficient autonomy from landed elites to carry out their reform program.

**Figure IV: Theory on the Politics of Land Reform**



Credit: Tessa Sinclair

While the evidence available has supported the theory on the politics of land reform, the findings of this thesis are not without limitations and they are preliminary in nature. As discussed in Chapter Three, the evidence used to test the hypotheses is obtained through secondary source material. Given the limited scope of this thesis and the secondary source material available, the hypotheses could not be tested as rigorously as desired. The analysis contained in Chapter Four is derived from empirical observations from a relatively small

number of secondary sources. While detailed scholarly accounts of land reform programs in the Philippines are more common, they are difficult to find on South Korea, Taiwan and especially Thailand. Due care has been taken to separate empirical information from analysis and opinion when drawing on the secondary source material in Chapter Four. There is a risk, however, that the empirical information available was tainted by the arguments respective authors wished to make at the time and that this has unwittingly influenced the arguments contained in this thesis. If a greater number of secondary sources were available to draw on, scholars' empirical accounts of land reform programs could have been cross-checked. Frequently only one or two secondary sources have been utilized to describe specific land reform programs across the four cases. While beyond the scope of this thesis, a wider reading of secondary source material in related areas of inquiry and a survey of primary source material would help to increase the reliability of the findings presented.

A second issue arises due to the lack of secondary source material. The dominance of the literature on the Philippine case may led to conclusions biased to the particularities of the archipelago's experience of land reform. For example, the conclusions drawn on the final assumption, that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform, are most persuasive in the case of the Philippines. The conclusions drawn on the final assumption would have been more reliable if detailed secondary source material was available on the other three cases.

The case of South Korea is especially interesting in this regard. While the American Military Government had a high degree of autonomy from landed elites in the south of the Korean Peninsula, President Rhee's Government did not, yet land reform still occurred. A closer examination of the events leading up to President Rhee's land reform program using primary source material is perhaps required to either reinforce or challenge the importance of

autonomy as a variable. Based on the secondary source information available, this thesis was not able to fully explore and analyze the dynamics at play between President Rhee's Government and landed elites. While this thesis finds that the degree of autonomy governing elites have from landed elites is likely to determine the extent of land reform, further analysis of the South Korea case has the ability to challenge this finding or, in statistical methodology terms, lead to a Type One Error. If, however, further analysis were to uphold the finding that the degree of autonomy between governing elites and landed elites has significant explanatory power, scholars focused primarily on the role of political instability and legitimacy building as the answer to why reform does or does not occur may need to reassess their theories.

### Why Do These Findings Matter

This thesis finds that reforms that appear to be in the best interests of the majority are not often pursued because they are not in the self-interest of those in power. Governments do not often allocate property rights efficiently. They are instead allocated to important groups in society to reduce transaction costs and buy loyalty (North 1981). While this may serve the interests of governing elites, large segments of the population remain unproductive and poor as a result. Land reform helped to transform Taiwan and South Korea from impoverished countries to wealthy, relatively equitable ones in just a few decades. The motivation to understand why land reform had been implemented in Taiwan and South Korea, but not Thailand and the Philippines, stems from the desire to understand why elites in the latter two countries were not able to prioritize the livelihoods of their people, or the productivity of their arable land. While the findings that this thesis has drawn are disappointing, they are also a reminder to ignore political rhetoric in both democracies and non-democracies alike and to look deeper at the bases of support on which governing elites rely on. In the case of the Philippines, President Magsaysay called for "land to the tiller"

while Presidents Macapagal and Marcos called for the “emancipation of the peasants” (in Ledesma 1980a), all three were likely insincere. It is only when citizens understand the nature of politics that they will be in a position to demand that their interests are accounted for. That land reform occurred in Taiwan and South Korea is a stroke of good luck for the tenant farmers and laborers that worked the land. Like those in Thailand and the Philippines, tenant farmers and laborers did not have the ability to advocate for their interests, but their interests seemingly aligned with those of the governing elites in the moment.

It transpired that Taiwan, South Korea and the other countries of East Asia were the fastest growing in the world in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Different regime types governed Taiwan and South Korea, but both decided to implement land reform. This decision saw the incidence of poverty in the countryside dramatically reduce, which contributed to agricultural productivity and created social conditions that were conducive to swift industrialization. Land reform gave former tenants and farm laborers economic security. This enabled them to send their children to school, which in turn created a skilled workforce for industry. Land reform also created more equal societies and undermined the influence of landed elites, who had previously dominated politics. In countries where landed elites have continued to be influential, they have often plundered state resources and captured policy generated rents, undermining governing elites efforts to foster industrialization. While this is a common occurrence in Thailand and the Philippines, it did not happen in Taiwan and South Korea (Boyce 2005). As Tai notes, “Ironically, in the context of history, the impact of land reform is not to enhance the economic and political value of land, but to reduce it” (1974, p. 479). As the experiences of Taiwan and South Korea demonstrate, this is a good thing.

Of the two cases studied where land reform was not implemented, landlessness and rural poverty continue to be relevant. In the Philippines, landed elites continue to own a

significant portion of cultivatable land because of the flawed Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) legislated for by President Aquino in 1988. It has enabled landed elites to undermine the purported purpose of the scheme by distributing land to family members. Poor information on land ownership continues to be a problem and has helped landed elites to evade land redistribution (Ballesteros and Cruz 2006). CARP also favored landed elites by setting a high land retention limit of 14 hectares, prioritizing the redistribution of public land over private land, and allowing landed elites to determine the beneficiaries of land redistribution, as well as those excluded from the program (Tadem 2015). In 2014, 26 years since it was first enacted, CARP expired when members of the Philippine Congress did not approve President Benigno Aquino's proposal to extend it for another two years (The Philippine Star 2014b). Founded in 1985, the Peasant Movement of the Philippines, or the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), continues to struggle for "a genuine agrarian reform programme" (KMP Facebook Page 2018). The KMP welcomed the end of CARP and called for it to be replaced by genuine land reform. They stated that CARP resulted in violent clashes between landed elites and farmers, with 664 farmers killed over the course of the program's existence (The Philippine Star 2014a). Symbolic of the failure of the CARP, land from Hacienda Luisita, the Aquino family estate, has not yet been fully redistributed due to the slow bureaucratic process and the continual harassment of beneficiary farmers (Tadem 2015). An example of the lengths landed elites are willing to go to to preserve their power is President Benigno Aquino's targeting of a Chief Justice who ordered that an Aquino family plantation be split up as part of his anti-corruption campaign (Economist 14 May 2016).

While the Philippine economy has been growing rapidly, widespread poverty continues. Between 2010 and 2015, the average annual growth rate was 6.3 percent, but the segment of the population which continues to live below the national poverty line in 2015 was 26.3

percent; the same level as in 2009 and not much improved on the 2001 figure. Economic growth has benefitted the urban population and service sector workers, but over half of the poorest people in the Philippines are agricultural laborers, who are three times more likely than the urban population to live in poverty (Economist 14 May 2016). Until recently, politics continued to be dominated by a small number of governing elites with landed interests. An outsider, Rodrigo Duterte was elected as president in 2016; he “tapped into a deep resentment at the immense wealth and political sway amassed by a few elite families” (Economist 14 May 2016). Perhaps if traditional governing elites were able to perceive the threat posed to their continued dominance by the extreme inequality that persists in the Philippines, they would have introduced meaningful wealth sharing reforms.

In the decades following the Second World War, the Thai economy has transformed and as a result incidences of rural poverty have dramatically improved. In 1960, the agricultural sectors’ share of GDP was close to 40 percent, but fell to 25.4 percent by 1980 and has continued to wane. As the agricultural sectors’ share of GDP declined, banking, insurance and real estate sectors share increased. Rates of rural poverty in Thailand improved because the area of cultivation expanded and there was successful diversification into a number of profitable cash crops. Income opportunities outside of the agricultural sector, which accompanied the structural changes to the economy also helped to reduce incidences of rural poverty. While Thai Governments have improved the livelihood of their people over time, the Thai agricultural sector itself has been neglected. There has been a lack of policies to improve inequality, including changes to the structure of land ownership (Krongkaew 1985).

While poverty has been reduced, inequality between the rural and urban populations in Thailand has increased. Prior to the military coup in Thailand in 2014, Prime Minister Thaksin



Shinawatra attempted to boost the income of the rural poor, albeit via means other than land reform. The ruling military junta has since focused on the interests of its base, the urban middle class. Even prior to the military coup, the World Bank estimated that more than 70 percent of Thailand's public expenditure in 2010 targeted the Greater Bangkok area, which is home to only 17 percent of the population (Economist 1 August 2016). While a number of reforms are required to improve the plight of the rural poor in Thailand, land reform is one of them. Jon Fernquest, in an editorial for the Bangkok Post in February 2016, notes that Thailand is "plagued by seriously inequitable land distribution" and that "land reform requires strong political will...and a thorough understanding of how land inequity, an unequal power structure and political violence are related." The story of land reform in Thailand and the Philippines is yet to be finished.

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